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Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:
<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.00005ab1>

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Spectacular Political Experiments:

the Constitution, Mediation and Performance of Large-scale
Public Participation Exercises.

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Abstract

Foremost in contemporary debates about democratic renewal and the re-engagement of citizens in the polity are concerns about publicness and the modes of politics that may be suited to this task. In this thesis case studies of three large-scale public participation exercises are presented: a local governmental exercise; a national popular media initiative and a transnational/translocal social movement event. Engaging with these cases the research explores three, ostensibly different, approaches to and settings of engagement. The study utilises a mix of discourse analysis and participant observation to engage with different features of each case. The outcome of this analysis is an exposition of the forms of publicness and the modes of politics that are summoned up, articulated, negotiated and enacted through the performance of these exercises. Comparing the three cases the thesis then develops two interrelated lines of argument. First, because of a set of tensions inscribed into the ideas of the public summoned up in each setting, the publics of these exercises are characterised as *paradoxical publics*. And, secondly, the mode of politics privileged across the three settings is characterised as *spectacular* and *experimental*. The findings of this research problematise the idea that large-scale public participation exercises might somehow enact forms of politics that are more *direct*. The study also challenges the assumption that such practices might enable publics to act more *authentically*. Through a consideration of the relationships between a diverse, if limited, sample of contemporary large-scale public participation exercises this study instead contributes to the emerging politics of public mediation.

Acknowledgements

This thesis has developed out of conversations with my supervisors, Professor Janet Newman and Professor Michael Saward, so first of all I want to thank them along with the Centre for Citizenship, Identities and Governance for taking me on as a CCIG/OU funded PhD student. Janet, Mike and I each approach this topic from a different trajectory but our collective enthusiasm for this line of research has made our meetings (at least for me!) creative and enormously rewarding experiences. Mike, you've made 'political science' a lot more appealing than I thought it was before I started. Janet, you did the same for 'social policy' but I also want to thank you for your exceptional generosity, commitment and your confidence in me, without this I would have surely wavered even more than I did. I also owe a tremendous amount to John Clarke who has been an incredibly inspiring and an amazingly kind person right from the word go. Clive Barnett in particular but Doreen Massey along with many other staff and fellow post-grads in the faculty also made this process a fantastic experience.

Aside from people at the Open University I would like to express my gratitude to Chetan Bhatt and Mike Michael at Goldsmiths for suggesting I apply for PhD funding and continue with academic work (something I'd not considered until they raised the idea); Perry at New Economics Foundation for the fascinating experience I had while working on 'Democs'; and John Roberts at Brunel for reading my 1st year upgrade paper and offering me tremendously helpful feedback. I also want to thank those who facilitated access to the three settings I have researched for this project, especially Adam Lent, formerly of the Power Inquiry and Harrow Council; the group of regular participants that mobilise through the London Social Forum, particularly Frank; and those at ITV who admitted me as a member of the studio audience for the recording of an episode of Vote for Me.

I should also like to take this opportunity to thank friends and family. Thanks to Mishka, Roger, Jesse and Martin for their encouragement and banter; to Sukhwant for her friendship and for making sociology enjoyable; and thanks to Mike Hayes for those patient, very stimulating and pleasant conversations in your conservatory. I want to thank my mum, dad and sister for their unerring support, love, endless food and conversation; I also want to thank my wonderful in-laws Mr. and Mrs. Ahmed, I'm so grateful for your help, warmth and gorgeous food!

Most of all I want to thank my two number one loves: Tanveer you've been unbelievable;, critical, loving, kind and *extremely* patient; our conversation throughout this very long process has been brilliant. And Omar, you've been amazing; being with you at home over the last year and a half as you've been getting started with your life has made this work much less stressful, much more pleasurable (and certainly multi-dimensional) than it would have been otherwise.

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Introduction

“Social future assemblies would help clarify the differences that increasingly divide us in our fast-fragmenting societies; they would, conversely, identify common social needs – potential grounds for temporary unities.” (Toffler, 1970:438).

“When participation meets the expectations of today's citizens they will get involved.”
(Power Inquiry Report, 2006:96)

From the mid 1990s onwards there has been a proliferation of new work in political, democratic and social theory making the case and outlining approaches for ‘participatory politics’ of various kinds (see for example Cornwall and Coelho, 2007; Fung 2006; Smith 2008). At a time when established and more conventional forms of institutional politics are routinely cast as insufficiently inclusive, accountable and engaging this is perhaps to be expected. According to Mair (2006), popular disengagement from mainstream party politics has “hollowed out” Western democracy, generating a “void” of public indifference, citizenly withdrawal and de-politicisation (2006:25). Whether or not we agree with this evaluation it remains the case that, not since a surge of academic interest and practitioner activity in the late 1960s and 1970s (see for example Bachrach, 1967; Pateman, 1970; McPherson, 1977), has there been such scholarly interest and practitioner enthusiasm for ‘new’ forms of *participative* politics.

This research arises out of a concern for the relationship between the contemporary theoretical work on participative politics and developments in practice. My apprehension is that this work has not yet:

- critically engaged with the *diversity* of forms of public participation exercises that are currently being experimented with;

- focused on the task of accounting for *differences and similarities* between the ways in which contemporary public participation exercises are constituted, assembled, mediated and performed in practice;
- developed a politics of public participation that is related to the diversity of contemporary developments.

For these reasons, this thesis emerges from an intensive micro-level engagement with a sample of public participation exercises as they are enacted in practice. The approach I have used engages with the ideas, imperatives and norms summoned up by these practices; and with the ideas, imperatives and norms of publicness and politics that are generated in literatures concerned with participative politics. The study is designed to demonstrate the diversity of this rapidly expanding field of practice, and to illuminate relationships of similarity and difference within it. I have needed to work across disciplinary boundaries that exist between different bodies of literature on public participation and draw on literatures that have not so far been used to reflect on public participation exercises.

The field across which public participation exercises are being deployed of late is vast. It is a field, however, that has rather fuzzy edges or at least boundaries that are constantly in the process of being built and breached. It is a field that is palpable but also one that is still very much in the process of being defined. A quest to provide an overview of either the texts or the practices associated with this field is therefore problematic. Rather than trying to begin by engaging with the vast array of potentially 'relevant' literatures on 'participatory politics', 'publicness' and 'public participation', I want instead to engage here with one way that this field has been constructed by a recent public participation initiative. I do this because this is how my own understanding of this field began to develop. I do this also, however, because a brief look at this single case will serve as a way to introduce some of the

themes that this study will be concerned with and a way of illustrating the value of a practice-oriented approach.



Figure 1. Logo used to promote Democs, 2003

Democs (an acronym standing for Deliberative Meetings Organised by Citizens) was developed initially in 2002 by the UK charity and think-tank New Economics Foundation (NEF). NEF describe this initiative as “part game, part policy-making tool” (Democs homepage on NEF website, accessed January 2006), the purpose of which is to enable “people to engage with complex public policy issues; to find out about them; express their views and seek common ground with other participants” (ibid.). To engage prospective participants, the Democs approach makes use of a specially designed set of materials that are packaged in a box and presented as a game. Funded by Wellcome Foundation, early versions of Democs worked to engage several hundred people in small-group discussions about a particular set of biomedical issues, including stem-cell research and xenotransplantation. More recently however, NEF have worked with a wider range of organisations, using Democs to engage people in issues including homelessness (in association with the charity Groundswell), international trade (in association with Oxfam) and climate change (in association with Hereford County Council).

The involvement of these different commissioning organisations and the framing-work carried-out by focusing these exercises on these particular topics show how

forms of mediation are at work here. Democs has, nevertheless, been consistently promoted by NEF as an approach to public participation through which people can engage with, deliberate upon and thereby also organise political issues, ideas and priorities *directly, for themselves*. ‘Self-organisation’ is a key concept that features time and time again in the NEF material concerning this initiative. Indeed, the realistic prospect of Democs exercises being completely instigated and organised by participants and being used by them to “challenge” official government agencies is even raised in one of its reports (Walker and Higginson, 2003:24).

The idea of self-organisation is, however, most evident in NEF’s claim that it is possible for prospective participants to organise and play Democs without the need for an expert facilitator to be present. Self-organisation, NEF claims, is possible because Democs is packaged in kit form and is designed to be easy, and indeed enjoyable to play. This means, NEF claim, that the game has enormous potential accessibility, reach and flexibility. The game’s design would make it possible to involve many hundreds or thousands of people in political participation by allowing people to organise and manage themselves in small groups at times and in places of their choice; such as after work at somebody’s home; in a local café or pub; or in a more formal setting such as a workplace or community centre (Walker and Higginson, 2003:21). By aggregating the results of these activities, Democs, NEF claims, has the potential to provide an insight into public opinion – information that could then be used to inform, influence or even guide public policy of various kinds.

Having very briefly summarised some of the features of Democs, I now want to briefly highlight the challenges that this case raises. Once we recognise the different ways in which Democs invites participants to participate as a public how should we conceptualise the public of Democs? And how should we understand politics as it is constructed by this case?

What is particularly challenging, analytically, about Democs is that publics are constituted here as social entities that have diverse sets of needs, desires and norms. They need an existing organisation to frame and organise bouts of deliberation around extant issues of public policy and to bring these activities to the attention of governmental institutions. But publics also, it would seem, have a desire to enjoy themselves, a need to play games. Publics are also constructed by Democs as entities that have a desire and an ability to organise themselves politically from the 'bottom-up', independent of pre-existing public or governmental institutions. Politics is constructed as something geared towards the evolution of ongoing public policy trajectories and democratic institutions; as something that can be pleasurable; and as something that can be generated through some form of voluntary 'bottom-up' civic or public activism.

Democs summons-up, articulates and mobilises, therefore, what seem to be different ideas of publicness and politics. It addresses and invites prospective participant-users to work within the boundaries of particular domains of practice constituted as: government, leisure, and social movement activism. But, by bringing these domains and forms of address into relation with one another, Democs also invites prospective participants to work across the boundaries between these domains. Democs appears therefore to be working to reproduce *and* to interrupt or interfere with boundaries between these domains of practice; each of which are usually thought to involve a specific, and different, way of constituting, engaging and performing the public. Public policy development activities and the domains of governmental politics are brought into new relationships with playing games and the domains of leisure and entertainment. These activities, in turn, are brought into relation with notions of activism and the domain of civil society and social movement practice. Looked at in this way, this case (and I shall be showing later that other

contemporary public participation exercises also demonstrate this) constitutes publicness and the political in curious, experimental and possibly pre-figurative ways.

What are, ostensibly, quite distinct performative repertoires; ideas of the public subject; visions of what constitutes a public assembly; and understandings of politics are all brought into relation with one another, by Democs. In doing this, Democs works to utilise these differences to construct itself as a particular kind of 'innovative' public participation exercise; something that appears somehow 'new' because of the way it seems to work to interrupt 'business as usual'. While clearly setting itself up as some kind of public participation exercise, the status of this activity as a mode of politics; the types of public subjecthood and forms of identification it invites; and the indications that Democs gives about what will be entailed to assemble the process publicly, seem novel though ambiguous. It is the way that contemporary forms of public participation exercise work to fashion 'new' ways of enacting publicness and politics that this thesis will partly be concerned with investigating. Of particular concern will be the ways in which such exercises work to cast themselves as somehow more 'real', 'authentic' and 'direct' than more established and 'conventional' forms of politics.

It was through being involved (2002-04) as a design-researcher with the team who developed Democs, that my curiosity was aroused about the forms that public participation exercises were, at that time, taking and about how this field was being configured as a result. What, I wanted to know, is at stake in and across this field? Certainly there were issues about when, where and how politics should take place. Should it take place within governmental institutions, via constitutional procedures in line with formal legislative and administrative timetables, or should it instead take place at home, after or during work or in the pub or café as Democs proposes?

What are the implications of working to enact politics as an informal, everyday and even enjoyable and exciting leisure pursuit or of valorising forms of politics that appear to be 'self-organised' and, generated through publics organising themselves somehow independently from 'the bottom-up'? Should certain performative repertoires be lent more status than others in such public participation exercises or could different repertoires co-exist and work together? If so, how?

These are a few of the questions that I set out right at the beginning of this PhD to try and address in this research. They were sparked by an analysis of the way Democs was constructed as a public participation exercise (Mahony, 2004) but also through a small scale mapping exercise that I undertook subsequent to this in the first year of my PhD project. This mapping exercise sought to probe different literatures concerned with public participation in politics and – looking beyond Democs – different forms of practitioner activity being undertaken at that time. This activity provided this research process with a particular kind of impetus. As a result of this exercise I observed that in some of the literature on the topic of 'participatory politics' there was a live and fiercely contested debate underway concerning the status, identity, capabilities or, in short, the constitution of publics. Furthermore, on looking at the kinds of activities that were being undertaken to engender forms of public participation in politics, I observed both publics and politics being constructed in a multiplicity of different ways. From this I therefore concluded, if rather tentatively at this stage, that the lines of questioning that had developed through working with Democs at least had some relevance and currency beyond discussions around this particular case. What happened during this mapping exercise was that I found myself slowly beginning to identify particular bodies of literature that related to the different issues and questions raised by my engagement with Democs. The mapping exercise also helped me begin to identify various sets of practitioner

activities that seemed to evoke the different ideas of publicness and politics that I had started to identify.

The results of this mapping exercise are set out in chapter 1. The purpose of this chapter is to document and highlight some of the debates and positions assumed in the theoretical literature that I engaged with as part of this mapping exercise and to relate these positions to particular types of practitioner experimentation. As I stated at the beginning of this introduction, the boundaries of this field are not currently stable, and one of the implications of this was that it was necessary for me – as a researcher – to at least temporarily construct the boundaries of this field for the purposes of this research. I did this by engaging predominantly, though not exclusively, with three distinct, though not totally unconnected, bodies of literature. These were selected initially because they helped me to engage with the issues raised by Democs and also because of their potential to open up a broader range of questions about diversity, similarity and difference in public participation initiatives. The three literatures used were:

- a literature concerned with the activity and theory of *deliberative democracy*, especially in relation to experiments designed to open up governing institutions;
- media studies literature concerned with the domains of *leisure and entertainment* and particularly with how entertainment practices, by offering pleasure and excitement, could facilitate new forms of political access;
- literature exploring how political participation and publicness are being currently thought about by scholars concerned with *contemporary activism*, particularly activism as it is constructed from the 'bottom-up' by the global social justice movement.

By probing these different literatures, and by recognising how ideas circulated by them appear to inform the different domains of public participation, it started to become possible for me to identify and describe some of the characteristics of this extended field a little more clearly. This work is documented in chapter 1. This research was triggered by a set of observations about a particular public participation exercise and therefore did not begin by privileging one particular normative theoretical framework above others. Instead it began with an observation about how certain sets of normative – if rather vaguely articulated – ideas of the public and politics were summoned-up and stitched-together through a particular public participation exercise. For this reason I set out to continue to explore the construction of normativity (that is, how normative ideas of publicness and politics are generated, both in the literature and within specific initiatives). The aim has been to try to bring these different processes of construction and circulation into closer relation with each another. However, my focus will not just be on tracing normative constructions of the public; the processes of enactment, performance, negotiation and contestation are also of key concern throughout this empirical work.

In chapter 2, I discuss my research design and the methodological approaches that inform the study. One further piece of pilot research assisted me with the process of deciding how to approach this research. For this I conducted preliminary investigations of what later became my three case study initiatives. Whereas when I explored Democs I looked simply at how this mechanism had been designed and promoted by NEF, when I undertook this pilot research, I soon found that there were opportunities to collect a much more diverse and much richer set of materials for analysis. Collecting and trying to find a way of analysing these materials, while exciting, was also, at least initially, rather overwhelming. The process of trying to reflect on why this was and of generating ways of dealing with this material was

nevertheless of great value. This process and its results are also summarised in chapter 2.

My engagement with different literatures and this piece of pilot research revealed to me that in order to engage with the questions and issues that concerned me it would be necessary to select entry points into the processes taking place in particular areas of the field. By doing this I could examine samples of the practices and activities being undertaken in very different public participation exercises.

Furthermore, by examining the same entry points in different cases, I could compare the processes being enacted through more than one exercise. I finally decided to generate three case studies: one of a government-sponsored public participation exercise; one of a popular-media venture; and a further case that would enable me to look at a public participation exercise generated by social movement practitioners. These cases are presented as chapters 3–5.

Following the three case study chapters I then look across and compare the forms of publicness (chapter 6) and the forms of politics (chapter 7) generated by the three exercises. The conclusion then reflects on the findings and how issues emerging from this research process might be taken further.

The overall **aim** of this thesis is, therefore, **to demonstrate how studying the enactment of contemporary public participation exercises can illuminate the normative categories of publicness and the political**. The thesis will show how public participation exercises work to generate and mediate relationships between diverse and, ostensibly, contradictory norms of both publicness and politics. By doing so they not only work to frame, prescribe and limit forms of public politics but also, at the same time, open-up and construct ‘new’ experimental and possibly even pre-figurative forms of practice.

There will be two **objectives**:

- **To investigate how diverse forms of publicness are being brought into relation to one another via contemporary public participation exercises.** This first objective sets out to explore not just how publics are generated and performed in these settings but the relative status of different publics and public norms that may be privileged.
- **To investigate the modes of politics brought into being by a sample of public participation exercises.** The focus of this second objective is the exploration of the characteristics of the 'new' forms of politics that are being experimented with here.

Addressing each of these objectives, this research explores how public participation initiatives work to reproduce various already-existing versions of publicness and politics, while *also* enacting broader sets of changes to the character of publicness and to the way politics is practised. The hope here is that this work can contribute to the much larger and more long-term collective project of thinking through how normative versions of publicness and politics might be mediated and generated publicly, via performances of large-scale, collective participation.

Chapter 1

Engaging with the literature

As a result of contact with Democs I was provoked into analysing further issues raised by this case. It was not immediately obvious to me, when embarking on this research project, which literature would be most helpful with this task. Part of the problem was that the issues raised by Democs were themselves still somewhat vaguely articulated and needed further refinement. However, there was already, unsurprisingly, a very well developed literature that thematises and critically engages with the concept of deliberation, 'deliberative democracy' and how versions of 'deliberative democracy' might be practised. Deliberative was, of course the 'D' in Democs. There is also, perhaps slightly more surprisingly, a growing and much more recent literature that concerns itself with the relationship between contemporary politics and entertainment. This literature became of interest, initially at least, because of the way it helped with the process of thinking further about the 'gameness' of Democs. And, finally, there is vast literature that discusses social movement practices and the forms of 'bottom-up' politics that are also valorised, or at least invoked, by Democs. This literature was deemed relevant to this research process because of the way it engages with issues of public self-organisation.

While each of these literatures is, in itself, extensive, what this initial process of exploration revealed was that there were a number of basic thematic resonances between the way that Democs was going about addressing publics and constituting politics and some of the ongoing debates in the literature about these topics. This initial foray into the literature, however, also pointed to certain gaps and absences. While it was possible to pinpoint examples of authors who dealt with some of the

different issues and, more specifically, the different domains of publicness and politics that are invoked by Democs, it was not possible to identify a literature that looked at these issues and domains together or in a way that related them to one another. In short, while it was relatively straightforward to find academic material that discussed public participation in the governmental domain, the domain of entertainment and leisure or the domain of social movement or activist practice, it was not possible to find a literature that discussed the relationships or connections between these domains. Most striking was the absence of a literature that deals with how public-participation exercises work – or should work – across or between them.

This realisation was a significant moment for me. It showed that the kind of practice that Democs was working to construct was not, as far as I could tell, currently being researched, analysed or theorised in the way that I was seeking to develop it. The process of pursuing these different literatures was also significant in that it allowed me to move this project beyond Democs whilst doing so in a way that enabled the concerns that it raised to be pursued further. The literatures that I engage with below helped me to open-up and thereby elaborate on these issues and problems, while also enabling me to narrow my focus on what I wanted to do with this research. The rest of this chapter is presented in three parts. Each outlines and engages with a literature that helps in that process.

1.1 Deliberative public politics

In recent years, the question of how reasoned, disciplined and inclusive forms of public participation may be cultivated to supplement aggregative, electoral forms of democracy has become increasingly focused upon in policy debates. Jürgen Habermas's work on this topic has been key to these developments in that it generates a particular and distinctive concept of public participation centred on the theme of deliberative rationality. In outlining some of the key characteristics of the Habermasian notion of deliberative rationality, this section will highlight some of the main features of the normative theory and forms of public participation practice that have emerged from it. The section will also touch on some of the key criticisms that have been levelled at these various formulations.

Fundamental to Habermas's considerable body of work on the notion of deliberation and its role in liberal democracies is his book *The Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere* (1989). Combining philosophical and empirical arguments, Habermas generates in this work a rich historical account of the rise and fall of a particular idea and practice of public participation in the political. The particular concept of publicness and public participation favoured by Habermas in *Transformations* emerges from his exploration of the rise of bourgeois public spheres as counterweights to absolutist states in early modern Europe (1989:11-20; 60-61). For Habermas these developments were crucially important because they began to make states accountable to sections of the citizenry. One of the ways that this came about was through the development during this period of a particular kind of discursive practice that enabled the formation and transmission of reasoned bourgeois public opinion to the state (ibid. 14; 94-106). This process was facilitated, Habermas asserts, through the emergence of a free press and institutions such as coffeehouses through which free speech and deliberative forms of argumentation

developed and flourished (ibid. 160). As noted by Nancy Fraser (1992), the Habermasian notion of the bourgeois public sphere describes an ideal of unrestricted rational discussion of public matters:

“The discussion was to be open and accessible to all, merely private interests were to be inadmissible, inequalities of status were to be bracketed, and discussants were to deliberate as peers.” (Fraser, 1992:113)

The utopian potential of these processes, for Habermas, was that they could result in an encompassing sense of consensus embracing the common good. And it is this potentially emancipatory quality of public reasoning and rational dialogue identified through Habermas’s study of the bourgeois public spheres of the nineteenth century that is the subject of much of his work. Habermas’s project hinges on the acceptance of his claim that the communicative norms he identifies from his study of the bourgeois public sphere of the nineteenth century may be universalised or at least seen to be in some way transcendent (1989: 73-79), an aspect of Habermas’s work that has attracted considerable attention. While many ‘deliberative democrats’ have used this claim as a basis for elaborating Habermas’s ideas into proposals and new mechanisms to facilitate deliberative public participation practice, a number of critics have problematised aspects of Habermas’s conception of public participation in politics.

One of those scholars known for his elaboration of Habermas’s ideas is John Dryzek (2000). Dryzek argues that the deliberative turn in democratic public participation theory represents a renewed interest in the authenticity of democracy and ‘the degree to which democratic control is substantive rather than symbolic, and engaged in by competent citizens’ (2000:1). Although there are many variants of deliberative democracy, another of its proponents, Benhabib (1996), asserts that a

key presupposition held in common by these scholars is that democratic legitimacy should rest on and result from, “processes of collective deliberation conducted rationally and fairly among free and equal individuals” (1996:69). Inspired by these writers of the so-called deliberative turn, others have developed detailed principles (see for example Cohen, 1989) or models for new forms of public participation practice (see for example Fung, 2003).

Of the many examples of deliberation-oriented public participation practises now in use (for reviews of recent innovations see Cornwall, 2008; Involve Working Paper 1, 2005; Smith, 2005, 2008) one that has become relatively well known in recent years is the citizens’ jury. This technique was first used in the UK in the mid-1990s to engage publics in policy discussions on various planning, technology, environmental and health issues (Smith, 2005:41). In common with the legal jury, the citizens’ jury purports to give citizens the “time and space” (ibid. 2005:41) to deliberate on significant public policy issues with evidence from the UK, US and Germany suggesting that citizens do actually take their role in such processes “seriously” (Smith and Wales, 1999:298). Smith (2005) also claims there is evidence that one citizens jury process conducted by the Department for Trade and Industry in the UK has influenced UK government policy-making at the highest levels (2005: 46). Other examples of innovations include ‘deliberative polling’, the brainchild of American political theorist James Fishkin, that claims to be able to use public deliberation to generate more “considered judgements” than conventional methods of “top of the head” polling (Fishkin, 1995:43); ‘deliberative mapping’ that attempts to combine citizens and more specialist evaluations of complex issues where there “is no obvious way forward” (Deliberative Mapping Briefing Paper 1, March 2004, p.4); and, of course, Democs, the participatory deliberative game devised and promoted by the New Economics Foundation that triggered my present interest in researching this topic.

While differences of interpretation have therefore come to exist regarding the practices needed to facilitate processes of deliberative public participation, two important assumptions have been seen to be common to the theoretical accounts of deliberative democracy. One is the tendency amongst advocates to assume, following Habermas (1996), that contingent distortion alone impedes the ideal of undistorted communication between citizens (Squires, 1998:139). Another is the assumption that singular forms of rational conduct might be located and/or agreed upon, and that these forms of conduct would allow citizens to participate in deliberations in ways that are fair and open enabling impartial and consensual decisions to be arrived at (Mouffe, 2002:3).

Writers such as Iris Young (1996) have problematised these assumptions, asserting that there is a tendency amongst proponents of deliberative democracy inspired by Habermasian thinking to believe that “deliberation is both culturally neutral and universal” (1996:123). A range of other authors have also argued that gender (Phillips, 1992; Lister, 1998), ethnicity (Lewis, 2000; Parekh, 2000) and other concepts of difference such as age, disability and sexuality inform both access to such deliberation-based participation processes and the legitimacy of different voices heard within them (Barnes and Shaw, 2000; Sayce, 2000; Barnes, Newman, Knops and Sullivan, 2003). With claims to neutrality of Habermas-inspired models of deliberative democracy unsettled and shown to be potentially exclusionary, other authors (see for example Dryzek, 2001 and Young, 1996) have asserted that deliberation-based conceptions of public participation practice need to work harder to “open themselves equally to all ways of making claims and giving reasons” (Young, 1996:124). Young (2001) goes further than this in a later piece highlighting the virtues of what she calls “nondeliberative practices” such as street marches and

boycotts as forms of legitimate democratic criticism that need to be valued alongside more deliberative forms of discursive practice.

Other authors have however critiqued some of the more fundamental assumptions on which this Habermas-inspired body of deliberative theory is built. By situating Habermas's account of the rise and fall of the bourgeois public sphere amongst a range of alternative histories of public participation practice, Nancy Fraser (1992, 1997) highlights the role and forms of agency employed by a variety of 'counter-publics' that were contemporaneous to Habermas's bourgeois public (1992:112-118). "Not only were there always a plurality of competing publics [...] but the relations between bourgeois publics and other publics were always conflictual" (1997:74). For liberals, Fraser asserts, turning Habermas-inspired theory on its head, "the problem of democracy becomes the problem of how to insulate political processes from what are considered to be non-political or pre-political processes" (1997:79), among which are the economy, the family, and informal everyday life.

By foregrounding the biases and particularities at work in the Habermas-inspired notion of universal 'communicative norms'; the critical work undertaken by authors such as Young and Fraser highlights the contingent nature of the ideas of public authenticity and inclusivity. Public authenticity in Habermasian accounts of deliberative democracy is predicated on a general public submission to particular 'universal' norms of communication with inclusion being conditional on public collusion with these norms. Young and Fraser's work asserts the 'rationality' of forms of reason other than the Habermasian deliberative 'norm'. By doing this, however, these accounts also highlight the additional complexity potentially arising from any attempt to use more than one, universally agreed upon means of moderating participation between different groups. Squires (2005:11) offers an

insight that is useful here, noting that while understandings of public participation in politics will usually require a form or forms of reason to moderate them, such forms of reason can potentially be derived from very different rational frameworks.

Not all forms of reason may therefore rely on practices that are deliberative or even serious in quite the same way as the Habermasian accounts highlighted in this section do. The critical engagements with the Habermasian ideal I have highlighted here draw attention to the value of a diverse range of participatory styles, voices and modes of action. However, as Squires (2005) asks provocatively: “once we allow the aesthetic as a valid mode of political articulation must we relinquish our appeal to standards of reason and impartiality?” (2005:11). Such difficulties run through the attempts to engage publics through new media technologies and practices which is the focus of the literature reviewed in the next section.

1.2 Pleasurable public politics

“The search for entertaining citizenship is [...] at par with the attempts of social movements to open up the field to a wider range of actors.” (van Zoonen, 2005: 145)

Liesbet van Zoonen’s (2005) work is typical of a wider set of recent accounts and forms of experimental practice that seek to establish the status and potential of popular media as a legitimate means of ‘opening up’ and enabling wider public participation in politics. In her volume *Entertaining the Citizen* (2005), van Zoonen considers various ways in which key ‘personalisation’ and ‘dramatisation’

vocabularies used in popular culture might also be viewed as resources with the capacity to promote and develop citizenship. "On the simplest level, these vocabularies are entertaining in the sense that they make citizenship more pleasurable for more people", van Zoonen asserts, "but they also offer instruments to think about what citizenship should mean, and they invite a hospitable surrounding for the performance of citizenship" (2005:147). Aligning herself with the aims of deliberative democrats, while disputing the need for such processes to sideline the relevance of pleasure, entertainment and fun, van Zoonen proposes that popular cultural forms should be considered as potential means for engaging publics in deliberative practices (2005:149). Such modes of practice, van Zoonen claims, could offer, "a way into politics for people otherwise excluded or bored" (2005:150).

While van Zoonen explores the value of various modes of popular cultural practice for enabling her particular vision of citizenship to be realised, Stephen Coleman (2005) suggests ways that new media technologies might be used to facilitate forms of public participation that could help elected politicians become more accountable and more representative. Like van Zoonen, Coleman asserts that popular reality television formats offer insights into how mainstream politics might be made more engaging and 'real' for potential public participants. He argues that reality TV has the capacity to construct images of "unadulterated self-representation" (2005:195). This, Coleman believes, is what makes it possible for the public to evaluate 'Big Brother' contestants "in terms of their authentic claims to be like us: to present the public to itself" (2005:195). In the context of "late modern politics [...] characterised by the demise of deference and the celebration of experience" forms of directly accountable and visible representation are more likely, in contrast to conventional trust-based concepts, to be treated by publics as accessible and authentic (2005:194-5).

Both van Zoonen and Coleman openly problematise the pre-eminence given to the kind of rational-deliberative conduct favoured by those Habermas-inspired advocates of deliberative democracy highlighted in the previous section. Clearly these scholars do not valorise the normative ideal of the participating public as rational critical actor in political life in quite the same way as the Habermas-inspired accounts do. Temple's (2005) work elaborates further on the themes developed by van Zoonen and Coleman, and praises the so-called 'dumbing down' of contemporary forms of news media. Temple asserts that 'dumbing down' should be viewed positively as a stylistic shift away from, "a male dominated news agenda" towards more consumer and life-style coverage (2005:7). Drawing on McNair (2003), he grounds this shift in the positive influences exerted on journalism by feminism rendering news coverage "less pompous, less pedagogic, less male, more human, more vivacious, more demotic" (McNair, 2003: 50-51 cited in Temple, 2005:7). For that public, not interested in formal politics (the majority of people in Temple's view), 'topdown' news coverage, which assumes all readers and viewers are aware of the minutiae of political debate, will never be enough (2005:8). "Engaging and entertaining political coverage", Temple argues, should therefore be used to "encourage further examination of the issues at a more informed level" (2005:8).

Jones's (2005) work, charting and evaluating developments in 'vox pop' television programming, is also relevant here because of its rather more critical stance on contemporary media practices of this kind. His analysis focuses on the impact that new technologies, such as those that allow viewers to access and engage with a programme's discussion and decision-making processes, have had on both political and entertainment genres in the United States. Linking these developments to some

of the strategic and commercial imperatives that inspired broadcasters to invest in these approaches, Jones asserts that fierce competition between broadcasters and their concomitant desire to seek new ways of attracting and retaining audiences drove many of these changes in programming. “The move to ‘the people’s voice’ [...] created new temporal and spatial relationships with viewing audiences as networks encouraged viewers to extend their participation in the program prior to, during and after a particular show’s airing” (Jones, 2005:3). Through conducting case studies of two of the US broadcasters who have pioneered these modes of public participation in politics, Jones demonstrates how their experiments with new forms were ultimately “constrained by similar economic forces that have historically restricted political discourse on [commercial] broadcast television – namely advertising and carriage” (2005:11). Jones’ research stresses that the so-called ‘people’s voice’ was only easily able to find its place in the market-based media environment of the United States when that voice was not “too overtly ideological” (2005:11).

Such research, while not necessarily refuting the claims being put forward by van Zoonen, Coleman and Temple, draws into this analysis the economic context that frames a good deal of contemporary media and cultural practice. As in the work of critics of deliberation-oriented accounts of public participation in politics such as Nancy Fraser, Jones’s work highlights the importance of exploring both the ideological dynamics at work in the making of these particular economic contexts and how these factors impact on the forms that public participation takes in particular setting. His empirical work demonstrates that it was in part because of the demands of advertisers that broadcasters were required to ensure that public participation in political TV shows was not *too overtly ideological*.

Andrejevic's (2004) analysis of how contemporary reality TV genres have utilised public participation goes further by highlighting the congruencies between this form of cultural production and particular kinds of economic and social relations.

Asserting that reality TV has in part been developed "as a means of enticing viewers to share in the production of a relatively inexpensive and profitable entertainment product" (2004:4), Andrejevic demonstrates in his work some of the ways in which reality TV programmes invite participants to sell access to their personal lives and their expressive or performative abilities. In Andrejevic's view, the role of public participants in this mode of production is "in a way not too dissimilar to that in which they sell their labour power" (2004:4), not just in economic terms but also in terms of the divisions of labour and norms it reproduces. From a more cultural perspective media scholars Biressi and Nunn (2005) extend this analysis by highlighting the classed notions of 'ordinariness' and 'authenticity' constituted by many forms of reality TV programming. 'Reality' in these media discourses, according to Biressi and Nunn, is typically allied to the revelatory acts of these particular kinds of 'ordinary' and 'authentic' subjects (2005:36).

These forms of analysis show the importance of analysing the ways in which different inequalities – be they economic or cultural – might be reproducing themselves through various new forms of public participation practice. It is of course vital to resist the idea that all contemporary media practice is inherently biased towards one or another ideological configuration. While this can be demonstrated in recent years by the proliferation of 'alternative' media providers (such as Indymedia's use of the internet in the tradition of 'alternative' documentary production) this point has been best illustrated for me by the research I undertook early on in this process, again inspired by my involvement with Democs, mapping the field of contemporary 'political games'. For example, in the UK, Lincolnshire's

Drug and Alcohol Awareness Team has designed a board game to involve drug offenders, police and treatment officers in the generation of local law enforcement and drug dependency prevention strategy (see www.lincolnshire.gov.uk). A commercial computer game developer in the US has designed a multi-player online computer game – ‘KumaWar’ – to allow the public to ‘relive’ and ‘interact’ with current affairs from war-torn regions of the world (see www.kumawar.com). And, the Yes Men a group of anti-globalisation activists have created a card game that can be downloaded and played to demonstrate the complex interrelationships between the various personalities and entities connected to the US administration’s orchestration and execution of the current war in Iraq (see www.yesmen.org). These examples and many more like them (see www.watercoolergames.org for further examples of what this site calls “videogames with an agenda”) show how this specialised genre of media practice – gaming – is being used to engage publics for a varied ideological and cultural purposes.

Whether it is gaming, TV or the internet then the kinds of practices highlighted above might be seen as indicative of the increased interest and prominence given to ‘communications’ and ‘public relations’ techniques in contemporary settings of practice. In such settings citizens and publics come into contact with the huge number of organisations (be they NGOs, corporate or public sector) representing various ‘public’ or ‘private’ interests. Terranova (2004) has written extensively about the importance of public relations techniques, many of which she notes have originally been designed to help paying clients manage their public’s or audience’s reactions. Relying on affect, spectacle and celebrity “rational debates and communicative action have a marginal effect on this dynamic of fascination and distraction that we associate with mass culture” (2004:133-5). As such, “public relations work [...] and media manipulation [...] explicitly recognise that what needs

to be managed is not simply the knowledge that surrounds a particular event but its 'perception'" (2004:141). The power of communication and media, in Terranova's account, is related to the power to organise the imagination and establish a subjective correspondence between images, percepts, effects and beliefs (ibid.).

Following this, it also seems important to note the significant differences in the emphasis placed on ideas of 'reason' and 'emotion' and the relationship between these in these accounts. Brown and Michael's (2002) research into what they call the "rising significance of the affective" (2002:270) in the public sphere is relevant here. Exploring recent developments in participatory governance, Brown and Michael found that objectivity and the "detachment of distanced reasoning" (ibid.) was increasingly being linked to disconnected secrecy in the minds of publics and 'experts' alike. The language of rationalistic authority which, they argue, has often characterised processes of governance, is more recently being supplemented by "a language drawn from the naturalistic repertoire of emotions" (ibid.). However, Brown and Michael question the dominant 'naturalistic' reading of emotional performances however. Drawing on Mestrovic (1996), they raise the possibility of a 'post-emotional' performative milieu which "paradoxically valorises emotion whilst also recognising the emotions as artifice" (2002:270). In this account emotions are what Brown and Michael call "motivated productions borrowed to achieve instrumental goals" and as such "the basis for widespread manipulation by the self, others and the cultural industry as a whole" (Brown and Michael, 2002 citing Mestrovic, 1996, pp.6).

As has been shown, the group of contemporary authors highlighted at the beginning of this section claims to be offering ways in which public participation and integration into the political mainstream (including possibly the inequalities that these manifest)

might be facilitated. While these authors propose that this could be achieved by engaging positively with the task of finding ways to utilise the modes and styles of engagement linked to popular cultural forms in order to encourage certain kinds of public participation in politics, there are other authors, some of whom have also been highlighted here, whose work problematises these strategies in a number of ways.

Whether or not such moves are viewed positively, changes in the style or modality of contemporary political communication are likely to have complex effects including impacts on the way official 'political talk' is mediated and represented and changes to the ways in which different styles of popular political discourse are portrayed. Attention will therefore need to be given in this research to the way visual imagery and editing techniques are used to support oral and textual accounts and to the ways in which 'rational' and 'emotional' repertoires are performed and used to support each other. Equally important will be the analysis of the kinds of social relations and forms of publicness being constituted through the types of practices that have been touched on in this section. Key to undertaking this kind of analysis will be the examination of how certain ideas of the public and certain modes of politics are privileged over others and the effects of these practices on relations of inclusion and exclusion. These and other related issues are central to the authors and actors I engage with in the last of the three main sections of this chapter.

1.3 Transformative public politics

In contrast to the various ideas and practices aimed at reinvigorating (or at least extending) the idea of a singular unitary participating public as highlighted in the previous two sections, Nancy Fraser's (1995, 1997) work, as already touched upon in section 1, sets out to acknowledge and valorise the role of various historic and contemporary 'counterpublics'. These counterpublics, Fraser believes, have emerged as a response to the exclusions produced by what she calls 'dominant publics'. The mere 'bracketing' of systematic social inequalities as is advocated in dominant forms of public participation discourse will never be enough in Fraser's view if participatory parity is the goal. Participatory inequalities must first, Fraser asserts, be eliminated if this is to be achieved (1995:295). While such inequalities persist the proliferation of a variety of 'subaltern counterpublics' is beneficial (1997:82). Insisting that the struggles of such subaltern publics must aim to achieve a more equitable distribution of economic resources, Fraser also argues that some of these counterpublic struggles will inevitably be fought around issues of identity (1995:295). So whether feminist, neo-socialist or the counterpublics constituted around various ethnicities, Fraser asserts that only divergent and fragmented publics can serve to produce both the diversity of discursive opinions and the new social identities necessary to confront the inequalities endemic in dominant ideas of publicness, political participation and liberal democracy (1997:83).

As Simon Tormey (2001) notes in relation to the wider contemporary 'post-Marxist' or 'neo-socialist' canon in which Fraser's account is situated, this concept of publics and her understanding of public participation in politics serves to "recognise positively the multiple 'subject positions' modern society gives rise to and sustains whilst maintaining the overall commitment to the norms and values of the left radical tradition" (2001:127). In common with several other 'post-Marxists' such as Laclau

(1990) and Mouffe (1993), this is achieved in Fraser's account by utilising a concept of subjectivity that embraces the fluidity of identity (whether individual or public) and heterogeneous difference. In contrast to those Habermas-inspired scholars of deliberative-democracy committed to a search for universal procedures to facilitate fair and inclusive forms of public participation, the focus, in this kind of post-Marxist political philosophy, is on the recognition and facilitation of multiple publics from many plural, differentiated and highly fluid individual subjects. The aim here is to demonstrate the "validity and importance of forms of politics that are self-consciously constructed as localised, temporary, contingent" (Tormey, 2001:127).

Public engagement in political participation in these accounts may entail struggles between private, market-based forms of ownership and more social forms of control, or identity struggles for wider public recognition. Even so, the mode of public participation theorised in this body of work also hints at rather more processual forms of political activism situated in everyday cultural and institutional life and events. This emphasis on culturally situated political action is the focus of John Holloway's work in which he rails against the "impoverishment" (2002:16) that occurs through party-politically-oriented processes of public participation. Such processes, Holloway argues, not only separate party political leaders from the wider publics but also separate so-called *serious* political activities from *frivolous* personal activities like affective relations, sensuality, playing, laughing and loving (2002:16). Against such "puritanical" practices, Holloway advocates what he asserts to be a more integrated and ongoing approach to political participation situated not just in macro-level struggles for economic and institutional change but in the micro-politics of everyday life, interpersonal relations and events (2002:16). The note sounded by Holloway's normative work chimes with empirical work produced by social movement researchers Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (2001) who found emotional

incentives and rewards to be as crucial to public participation in a range of social movements as the overall 'cause' of particular organisations.

While Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta's research has explored 'new' social movement practices, John Holloway's work has been highly influenced by, and influential in one of the most prominent activist movements of recent years: the World Social Forum (WSF). The activities of the WSF are relevant here because they represent a concerted attempt to bring together the efforts of various movements struggling against aspects of contemporary globalisation in such a way that the focus of their activities remains as much on the means of struggle (that is on how struggles should and should not be organised) as on the ends of struggle, which in this case involves the generation of alternatives to so-called 'neo-liberal' forms of development and globalisation.

Christophe Aguiton (2005) suggests that one of the initial successes of the WSF was to generate forms of organisation and networks that enabled different generations of organisations and movements, from trade unions and NGOs to newer social movements to come together as a "movement of movements" (2005:10). While not a single, unified organisation, the WSF consists of hundreds, and on some occasions, thousands of local and global civil-society groups as well as non-affiliated individuals, united only by their shared opposition to 'neo-liberal' forms of globalisation and their commitment to generating alternatives. The WSF is probably as well known for its large-scale gatherings in Porto Allegro in Brazil (2001 and 2002) and in Mumbai (2004) as it is for its protests disrupting meetings of the World Trade Organisation or the G8 in Seattle (1995), Geneva (2001), Gothenburg (2001) or Evian (2003). These various mobilisations and meetings have spawned numerous regional Forum activities and meetings such as those held by the

European Social Forum in Paris (2003) and London (2004), as well as a huge number of local forums such as the London Social Forum which has met regularly and facilitated various activities since 2003.

“It [the Social Forum] (whatever ‘it’ is) will radicalise rather than institutionalise”

(Bullard, 2005: 4-7)

By bringing together diverse individuals and groups many Social Forum events have attempted to operate as relatively undirected ‘open spaces’ where people from a wide range of backgrounds, organisations and streams of thought (over 150,000 attended Mumbai Social Forum in 2003) are enabled to meet and interact without feeling that they have to agree with the views of organisers or subscribe to one another’s ideas or prescriptions. Propositions and formulations that emerge from Social Forums appear in the names of particular participants and not of the WSF, which itself provides no substantive leadership beyond what is stated in its charter of principles. The ‘self-organised’ character of WSF events has been one of its most noteworthy, if under-researched, features and it is to this that the richness of WSF events is often attributed. According to WSF advocates, the ‘self-organising’ approach has also been crucial in determining the ways in which various organisation have retained their autonomy while at the same time developing relations and particular cultures of collaboration with other groups during both live events and virtually using the internet (Keraghel and Sen, 2004:489). According to one activist-author, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2005), the strength of the Forum’s approach is that it is focused on the work of “translation” (be this through face-to-face or virtual encounters), geared to achieving possibilities for collaborative action between individuals and groups, rather than the development of any general theory of development or change (2005:16). This, according to Santos, is “work of epistemological and democratic imagination, aiming to construct new and plural

conceptions of social emancipation upon the ruins of the automatic emancipation of the modernist project” (2005:21).

The understanding of the role of public participation in politics emerging from various writer/activists associated with WSF activities links to the themes being developed in Nancy Fraser and John Holloway’s theoretical work on the value of counterpublic practices. One such link lies in the method by which the WSF presents itself as actively searching out ways to resist what it sees as the prevailing economic orthodoxies of ‘neo-liberal’ globalisation. Another reflects the WSF focus on ‘cultural’ issues related to activist identity, subjectivity, organisational form, everyday and institutional life, and how these function to constitute and reproduce various kinds of social inequality. Both Fraser and Holloway, from different perspectives, attempt a vision of participation that is cognisant of micro as well as macro-political aspects of power. Both aim to create participatory practices that are reflexive and politically transformative.

Practices that present themselves as transformative may, however, be understood in terms of new strategies of governing. Such a perspective emerges from a group of contemporary theorists who have elaborated the Foucauldian idea of governmentality (Foucault, 1997, 2000). This post-Foucauldian work problematises participation in a particular way by exploring participative practices as governing technologies. Nikolas Rose (1999), for example, develops the case for understanding certain discourses of participation as attempts to constitute governable subjects. Mitchell Dean (2002), also elaborating on Foucault’s idea of governmentality, does so by highlighting how practices – typically considered to be ‘liberal-democratic’ – are used, in his view, to encourage individuals and publics to “govern themselves” in particular ways over others (Dean, 2002:38). Dean’s work

focuses on the multiplicity of ways in which liberal-democratic capitalistic societies facilitate ongoing public participation in the reproduction of this particular form of order. According to Dean, forms of participatory control are particularly effective in this respect because they can work to square liberal government's commitments to individual liberty with obligations to maintain "certain kinds of cultural and structural relations" (Dean, 2002:38). Rose and Dean's contributions underscore why it will be important to reflect further on exactly how the Social Forum (as well as other kinds of participative exercises) work to summon-up, enrol and engage (actual and prospective) participants as active subjects.

The contributions of Rose and Dean each draw attention to the role of cultural practices in governance, a theme developed by George Yudice. In his 2003 volume *The Expediency of Culture* Yudice examines how the arts and other forms of cultural practice have recently come to be "wielded as a resource for both socio-political and economic amelioration" (2003:9) by NGO's and other kinds of organisations who often work in partnership with government in one way or another. Whether directed towards the "ideological (re)production of proper citizens" in ways already touched on above by Dean, or addressing social dysfunctions such as racism, or as an incentive for economic growth (such as job creation and expenditure cutting), Yudice demonstrates how cultural producers are increasingly being "channelled to manage the social" and to use various modes of cultural 'participation' to "deliver communities" (2003:12-13). Through detailed empirical investigations of a number of international 'regeneration' initiatives, Yudice illustrates how culture has become the driving force not only in new forms of "cultural capitalism" but also for managing social and economic difference (2003:23). Pinpointing some of the ways in which the cultural domain has become a central focus of liberal-democratic market activity, Yudice's work also shows how these activities are attempting to use culturally-

framed arguments and 'participative' practices to mobilise publics into seemingly 'everyday', 'commonsensical', 'authentic' and 'inclusive' forms of politics. This resonates strongly with my analysis of the strong cultural orientation of the Social Forum. The aspirations of the Social Forum movement and those discussed by Yudice are seemingly quite different; nevertheless, each of these kinds of activity seemingly works through the everyday and the authentic by offering and resourcing forms of practice that are participative.

The focus therefore returns again to the multiple ways in which publics are being constituted for political participation. What is or is not considered to be political, private, 'inclusive' and 'authentic' becomes very different in these various understandings. Notable too are the different spatialities at work in the different renderings of publicness that have been considered across the range of accounts highlighted here. Viewed spatially struggles for public culture can be seen to be occurring at various scales and in various settings. Some of these struggles work to identify and mobilise differences and link them to a group identity, others work to construct places or situations that will enable publics to emerge. Contemporary publics, as cultural geographer Clive Barnett (2004:188) notes, are also however increasingly "strung-out" within as well as across different locations and should therefore not be understood as necessarily bound to particular locales, forums, or face-to-face modes of interaction.

Conclusion

Drawing on the literature on deliberative democracy; the contemporary media; and on the global social justice movement this chapter highlights a range of different debates about how publicness and politics should be understood and practised. While there are some resonances between them (in, for example, the work of Fraser), these literatures have remained relatively discrete, and attract, as I have shown, distinct forms of critique.

The significance of choosing and reviewing these three literatures as one way of framing my research is that each presents a different image of the public itself and each envisages the political 'problem' to which participatory initiatives are a response in different ways. I shall elaborate on these differences in the case study chapters that follow (chapters 3-6). At this point, however, I want to suggest ways in which this brief overview of the literature will inform my research design and analytical approach.

As I have argued, the different bodies of literature, and the normative ideas they present, have informed the development of different domains of practice. The literature advocating a turn to deliberative democracy, for example, has helped shape, and in turn provided a critical commentary on, the development of numerous attempts by government (and some non governmental bodies) to engage the public through new sites and practices: the citizens jury, the participative budgeting event, and other kinds of deliberative forum. The literature on participation as pleasure has fostered, and in turn commented on, a different domain of practice: that of the mass media, the internet and other technologies through which 'new' publics can, it is assumed, be engaged. And the literature on social movement activism has

developed in the context of the emergence of a domain of transformatory politics, where it is the political itself that is the focus of change.

The identification of these different domains is suggestive of forms of empirical work that might be able to draw comparisons and contrasts, and in the next chapter I set out ways in which my research design has built on this possibility. I also begin to look beyond the specific literatures identified here, and their corresponding domains of practice, in order to generate my own analytical framework and a set of research questions.

Chapter 2

Research design and approach

The research process that has been utilised here has been both systematic and reflexive, in order to address the aims and objectives set out in the introduction.

While there are no universally agreed criteria for the evaluation of qualitative research, I want to suggest, following Potter and Wetherell (1987) that the study resulting from this process should be recognised as being of value for the following two reasons: first, the process is *coherent* (ibid:169-72), inasmuch as it has facilitated a range of plausible moves between data, analysis and theory; and, secondly, because it has been *fruitful* (ibid:169-72) inasmuch as its findings address the research aim outlined above (chapter 1) but also because it speaks and hopefully helps, in some small way, to bring into conversation a range of different research audiences and publics.

This chapter narrates the key phases of this research process, tracing how empirical findings, as well as more theoretical and methodological knowledge, were brought into relation with each other to generate research results. Section 2.1 outlines how the fields of this research were located and how a sample of cases was selected. In section 2.2 some of the results of an initial bout of participant observation are described in order to highlight the impact that this sensitising work had on the methodological decision-making process. Section 2.3 highlights the modes of reflexivity that have been most important to this research. The final part of this chapter, section 2.4, details the approaches that have been used to generate research material and the analytical approach that has been deployed.

2.1 Locating the field and selecting cases

Orientations
Deliberation
Pleasure
Transformation

Table 1: Orientations towards public participation

One advantage of the threefold typology of normative orientations discussed in the previous chapter and summarised in the table above is that it provides this research process with a starting point for empirical research. This is because one way of viewing these three orientations to public participation is to see them as presenting an indicative set of criteria that can be used to begin to guide the process of selecting new cases. This typology can be further elaborated and made more precise once it is recognised that there are clear suggestions in the literature (reviewed in chapter 1) that these three orientations are themselves linked to particular domains or fields of practice. The deliberative orientation is linked in some of these literatures to the domain or field of government; the orientation towards pleasure to the domain or field of popular media practice; and the orientation towards forms of political and public transformation is associated with the domain or field of social movement practice. These links extend this typology and potential set of criteria in a way that is illustrated graphically in table 2 (below):

Orientations	Domains
Deliberation	Governmental
Pleasure	Popular media
Transformation	Social Movement

Table 2: Orientations and domains of public politics

The process of developing this typology helped to construct and thereby bring the field of public participation that this research is concerned with into view. This typology was generated not just through a process of observation but rather as a result of a *reflexive engagement* between a researcher (myself), particular modes of practice and a particular sample of the literature. It was through this process of engagement with the literature, discussed in Chapter 1, that these ‘types’ of public participation were brought into relation with one another in a contingent way. The idea that it might be useful to select and explore further cases of public participation as a way of investigating how the forms of public politics highlighted in table 2 are generated in practice also taps into the authority of a well-established research approach: that of case study research. A case study approach has not been chosen by chance since there are good reasons why such a process is appropriate for this study. But what is meant here by case study research? And, why will it be useful?

As observed by Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2004:3), all research is, at least in one sense, case study research. For this reason it will be no surprise that ‘case study’ is a term that has both contested and unstable meanings. While not fixed, case study research does nevertheless typically imply “the collection of unstructured data, and qualitative analysis of those data” (ibid 2004:3). According to these authors all case study researchers need to grapple with the issue of how

many cases should be investigated and the amount of detailed information that needs to be collected about each case. Underlining this point, John Brewer identifies that the key dilemma for case study researchers is balancing the need for 'depth' and 'breadth' (2000:77). A further issue that is raised repeatedly in the case study research literature relates to the status that should be granted to the knowledge generated by this kind of approach, an issue that will be discussed further as this chapter unfolds.

A case study driven approach was judged to be most appropriate for this research project because it has the potential to facilitate an in-depth qualitative analysis and comparison of different public participation practices. A qualitative rather than a quantitative analysis is most appropriate here because the focus of this research is on the meanings and practices constituted and performed by particular public participation initiatives, how they are constructed and how they can be interpreted or translated, accounted for, reflected upon and learnt from. This approach was judged to represent an appropriate way of addressing the central aim of this research because of the way such qualitative approaches can afford the collection, analysis and comparison of unstructured sets of data relating to more than one event or setting. The possibility of comparison is important here because it will enable this study to explore both relationships within cases and relationships between them. Studying more than one case will also give this research greater breadth than would otherwise be possible. Greater breadth means, at least potentially, that this research can be made relevant to a broader public and a wider variety of other initiatives than might otherwise be the case.

The sampling strategy that has been used to identify a set of new cases was 'theoretical' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), or 'judgemental' (Brewer, 2000) and therefore once again qualitative rather than based on techniques of probability

sampling that are typically associated with quantitative modes of investigation. This qualitative approach corresponds with the overall aims and constructivist ontological biases of this research. Drawing on a version of constructivism developed by Newman (2007), this research aspires to show how events (and accounts of events) are *built* from a variety of resources; how construction processes imply *selection* (processes of inclusion and exclusion); and how construction process work to *generate 'realities'* (2007:56).

In the case of this research, a short-list of possible cases was initially generated by first identifying public participation initiatives that might map on to the three orientations and domains (tables 1 and 2). Following a strategy proposed by Burgess (1984:61), I then identified those initiatives that would be *accessible* during the period of time that I had available for the empirical phase of this research. The next step of this sampling process was to decide how best to balance the need for breadth and depth of study. Again there were resource constraints here as I was a lone researcher with limited time available for data collection, generation and analysis. After exploring various options, research schedules and possible combinations of cases, a sample of three case studies – one (apparently) located in each of the three domains of governmental, popular media and social movement practice – was eventually selected and access negotiated. Though ambitious, it was calculated that there would be sufficient time and resources available to engage with **three** different initiatives in some detail. The advantages of generating more than one case in terms of the breadth that this would give this study also supported this decision.

The first case selected was the Harrow Open Budget, a participatory budgeting initiative commissioned by a local government organisation. This case was chosen not only because of its sponsorship by a government body (a local authority) but

also because initial research indicated that this initiative oriented itself around forms of practice that would be **deliberative**. An initiative called Vote for Me was the second case selected. This case reflected the popular media domain, being a reality television political talent contest commissioned by the UK broadcaster ITV, and, according to its publicity materials, privileged the delivery of public entertainment and **pleasure**. The third and final case selected was an initiative called the 4th European Social Forum. This initiative was organised by social movement organisations that, according to my initial research, were oriented towards delivering particular kinds of political **transformation** through forms of public participation.

The decision to select this set of three new cases was based on indications that each would, firstly, be accessible and, secondly, correspond to the three domains and orientations (see table 3, below).

		O R I E N T A T I O N		
		Deliberation	Pleasure	Transformation
D O M A I N	Governmental	Harrow Open Budget		
	Popular media		Vote for Me	
	Social movement			4 th European Social Forum

Table 3: Typology of public participation

Table 3 (above) suggests a rather simple mapping of the case studies in terms of domains and orientations, a mapping that reflects in no small part the ways in which they presented themselves to their (putative) publics. However, during the period I

spent investigating possible cases, I noticed that different initiatives also worked to privilege different *scalar imaginaries* of the public. This, I began to recognise, opened up an important additional dimension of the research and an additional variable that it would be possible to explore. The scalar differences I had observed were between 'local' (Harrow Open Budget), 'national' (Vote for Me) and 'transnational/translocal' (4th European Social Forum) imaginaries of the public and politics, which the cases I had selected seemed to privilege (a different one of) these three spatial imaginaries. But the scales, as well as the domains, were hardly distinct. As Isin suggests: 'Scalar thought conceals the difference between actual (physical and material) and virtual (symbolic, imaginary and ideal) states in which bodies politic exist' (2007: 211). Each case study took place in a particular territorial space, but also invoked spatial imaginaries that worked across different scales and sites. For example, Harrow Open Budget was an initiative sponsored by a local authority seeking to secure its legitimacy with local electors. But it was also positioned in a competitive struggle for resources and legitimacy in a national field of governmental struggle between central and local governments and drew on transnational experiments in participative budgeting in an attempt to present itself as being at the forefront of its field. Vote for Me evoked a self-consciously national public imaginary, presenting itself in the context of the securely national institution of parliamentary elections. Yet its relationship to the established pattern of local accountability of its locally elected (and 'representative') MPs was, to say the least, highly ambiguous. The 4th European Social Forum was the most explicitly transnational or translocal of the three initiatives, yet brought an inconsistent and ambiguous understanding of the global/local dynamic to its deliberations, both in the topics it addressed and in the publics it summoned.

So while tables 1-3 offer apparently simple rationales for selecting case studies against two sets of variables, in practice I was aware from the beginning not only of

the possible entanglements between the three domains (from the literature review in Chapter 1) but also the complex interface between different scales and political spatialities. The 'empty spaces' in table 3 will, perhaps, be as significant as the filled-in boxes in the analysis that follows. However, for the moment, the mapping of potential case studies in this way allowed me to begin to look at how each of the three cases constituted and enacted forms of publicness and modes of politics and how, if at all, they expressed themselves in relation to the domains and orientations suggested in this typology. This research design would also make it possible at a later stage to compare the three cases and by doing so to assess possible relationships between different orientations and domains.

The typology had already been of great use to this research process in that it focused the next phase of this investigation around certain forms of public participation practice over others and facilitated the selection of case studies. However, to re-iterate, there was no reason to expect that this typology and this sampling strategy would in any way *determine* the forms of public participation performed in each of these settings. There were some indications that each of the new cases was working to privilege certain types of public practice over others, however, the research process would need to remain open to the possibility that the precise relationships would be more complicated and nuanced than suggested in the preceding tables.

The typology and this sample of new cases are each therefore designed to work as a provocation and, in particular, to interrupt the idea that there is a single clearly identifiable, fixed, stable or bounded field or set of activities that pertains to the study of public participation practices. This is important because this study aspires to "defamiliarise" (Alvesson, 2002:91) the study of public participation exercises and decentre public participation research by showing how such practices can be

encountered in a range of different settings and performed in a range of different ways. The 'truth', 'value' or 'objectivity' of one or other of the types of public participation foregrounded by this typology has not been privileged in advance of the empirical phase of this investigation. By bringing different types of practice into relation with one another the typology therefore also allows us to study how some of the boundaries between different types of public participation intersect or are held in place. This research design also makes it possible to investigate how *hierarchies* between different ideas of the public and different *performative styles* are generated in practice and how *assumptions* such as those regarding how politics and public participation should take place as well as assumptions regarding what the goals of public participation should be are mobilised in practice. By doing this the contingency of these forms of practice can be brought to the fore and some of the dynamism of this still emerging field can be plotted. This research strategy is therefore intended not just to develop new research knowledge but also to open up possibilities for interdisciplinary and meta-theoretical reflection.

2.2. Initial experiences of engaging with the cases

Having developed this typology and identified a set of case studies it became increasingly apparent that the research approach would give rise to an array of questions concerning the public status of this project. If the field and the possible orientations towards this topic are multiple how, for example, should the role and position of the researcher be located in this study? And how should I (as the investigator) attempt to use the (limited) public authority I had been granted? If publics are potentially heterogeneous entities, how should I understand to which

public does this research need to be accountable? And to which specific publics, political projects or audiences should I address this research?

I realised that I had gone into this project with a commitment to engage with the politics of public participation in order to understand how these practices might be used to develop a broadly leftist political agenda. I had begun this research with a largely unproblematised (and rather naïve) assumption that these commitments were somehow necessarily related and therefore somehow also necessarily compatible with each another. However, the research process began to throw this assumption into question. Despite observing the three initiatives enunciating aspirations to increase public participation in various kinds of politics, the closer I got to the cases the more ambivalent I began to feel towards the particular political projects *and* the specific practices that each initiative was enacting. This ambivalence was fuelled by the realisation that public participation practices could be used to exercise power in many different ways and to many different ends. While not therefore being able to adequately answer many of the questions that I raised about my own position, role and commitments at this early stage I was nevertheless hopeful that the best way I could explore these issues further was not only through further engagement with existing scholarship relevant to these issues but also through further empirical work.

To gauge exactly what forms of data and research material might be available for the process of case study research that I intended to conduct, a decision was taken to embark on an initial bout of participant observation in each of the three case study settings I was interested in exploring. I prepared for this by engaging with additional literature that helped to sensitise me to some of the different characteristics of each of these 'fields'.

Each case study setting was very different and, for this reason I felt that I acted and was treated differently as a participant observer in each setting. Because of problems these experiences raised and the subsequent effects they had on the research process, it is useful to recount a few of these experiences here.

In the Harrow Open Budget initiative, the first of the three case study settings, I was able to access some of the organisers of this event via email and to attend a focus group at which the 'methodology', later used at the main Open Budget public event, was trialled. In the case of Vote for Me I was able to secure a place as a member of the studio audience during the performance and recording of the first of the four 'live' programmes made as part of this television event. And, to sensitise myself to the kind of public participation practices that would be performed in my third case study setting, I followed a local Social Forum group for seven months, attending 12 meetings of the London Social Forum (a local Social Forum group) some of whose members I would later accompany to the much larger, regional 4th European Social Forum event that was staged in Athens, Greece in May 2006.

The Harrow Open Budget trial took the form of a focus group, I planned to use my initial bout of participant observation there as a way of sensitising myself to this type of initiative. More specifically, I attended this trial to help me understand and reflect upon the approach that would be used to facilitate public participation and political involvement at the main Harrow Open Budget 'public assembly' due to take place a few weeks later, and to help me decide how it might be possible to research this event. The publicity surrounding this initiative implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, evoked comparisons with the form of 'participatory budgeting' developed in Porto Alegre in Brazil in the 1990s. I had already begun to read about forms of 'participatory budgeting' as they had been developed in this part of South America and was interested to see how the version of 'participatory budgeting' planned for a

local authority in London would translate the Porto Alegre initiative, given that the latter had been able to use this process not only to engage many of those normally excluded from formal political deliberations but also to reduce various inequalities in this particular Brazilian municipality (Wampler, 2007). Because I felt enthusiastic and positive about what I had read regarding the Porto Alegre case, I entered into this initial bout of participant observation feeling similarly enthusiastic and optimistic about the Harrow initiative and keen to support what seemed, on the face of it, to be a pioneering attempt to introduce and develop this approach in London.

Arriving for the focus group, I was immediately informed that not all the participants who had registered to take part in this session had actually arrived (it was a sunny Sunday afternoon!). As a result, I was immediately faced with the organiser of this event inviting me to participate as a member of the focus group rather than as an observer or as a researcher. It would have felt awkward had I refused his invitation, given the problems he was facing running this event, and also because, at this point, I was pre-disposed to contribute in any way I could to this endeavour, I agreed.

The complexity of the situation in which I found myself as a result of this snap decision on my part was soon apparent to me. Before sitting down with the group of 'volunteers' to begin the focus group, I was asked by facilitator of the session to "act as if I am a normal member of the public" rather than a "researcher". What did this mean, I wondered? What kind of performance was I expected to affect in this role? The answer to this question soon presented itself since the process that we were invited to respond to as focus group participants was nothing like the one I had expected. The opportunities we were given to deliberate were tightly managed and directed, and the agenda was so tightly controlled that opportunities for deliberation

and the construction and development of participants' own ideas were curtailed and stifled.

For the first half of this three-hour focus group, I performed as I was instructed. In practice this meant completing an extensive set of pre-constituted tasks according to a pre-arranged timetable that was inflexibly managed by the group's facilitator. Because of the way these tasks were set-up, participants were encouraged by this process to interact in certain ways and discuss certain topics and not others. As a participant in this process, I found myself feeling increasingly indignant about the form of participation that I was being invited to perform. As a result, I gradually started to interject in the process by pursuing a certain line of questioning. At first, I interjected by asking questions of clarification. However, not receiving satisfactory answers, I gradually began to ask more wide-ranging questions such as: why was the agenda so narrow and so directed? Why does this process need to be so different from Porto Alegre? Repeatedly rebuffed, I lodged further objections and by the end, having experienced my questions and objections being repeatedly ignored or unsatisfactorily dealt with, I largely withdrew from participating by sitting in silence and simply observing and thinking further about what I was witnessing.

Most of the questions I asked during the latter half of the trial, related to the role that had been assigned to participants – or the *public* – enrolled to take part in this process and centred on complaints that *this* version of participation was not *sufficiently participant-centred*. What I found was that the more I supported a certain version of publicness and participatory politics (versions that I thought resembled the practices pioneered in Porto Alegre) the more I found myself in opposition to this 'Open Budget' approach and the person 'facilitating' this particular exercise. My persistent interventions eventually resulted in the facilitator casting me as 'negative' and as someone who was 'holding back the trial', which in one sense was true

although my aim was to engage constructively with, rather than to prevent, this process from progressing. I had entered into this bout of participation, I soon realised, with a certain set of beliefs about what this process would and *should* be like, and as I began to recognise that the process was being enacted in a different way from that which I had understood it would be, I had reacted by participating accordingly. Critical forms of engagement and participation were not, however, welcome in this setting unless they could be accommodated within the pre-constituted agenda and schedule generated for this event.

The form of participation that I performed during that focus group enabled me, albeit inadvertently, to encounter, recognise and begin to reflect on relations of power. The more I supported a certain idea of public participation, the more I found myself coming into conflict with another idea and another form of practice. The more I sought to participate in and engage with this process in the way I had expected to be able to, the more I was perceived as challenging the form of participation that I was being invited to perform. By challenging this form I realised I was also challenging (albeit in a minor and temporary way) the role of those organising and 'facilitating' this initiative.

Moving on to the case of Vote for Me, I had already collected some material such as press releases and media reports about this exercise and planned to video record the television programmes themselves and use these programmes to make a transcript of the broadcasts. Before undertaking any of these activities, however, I managed to negotiate access as a member of the studio audience to the recording of one of the five 'live' programmes that made up this television event. I had already begun to read some of the media studies literature on reality television and had therefore become acquainted with the idea (proposed by authors such as Nick Couldry, 2003:104) that the 'reality' of 'reality' television is a constructed reality.

However, this did not completely prepare me or provide me with the particular kinds of 'local' or 'field' knowledge that I was able to generate during that single evening spent in ITV's main recording studio on London's South Bank.

During the course of the evening I was able, for example, to engage with fellow members of the studio audience and learn how their presence at this event had been mediated by a third party commercial contractor. This was a company called 'Applause Store' whose business is to provide ITV and others with the studio audiences (and the seemingly spontaneous bursts of applause) they require to produce TV shows of this kind. Installed in the studio audience I was also able to observe how, in order to teach this audience to perform in certain ways and at certain times (and not in other ways and not at other times), the programme's floor manager tutored and repeatedly rehearsed this audience prior to the live broadcast. So despite the fact that this programme was, technically speaking, broadcast 'live', the liveliness of its public was somewhat constructed. While this would not have been immediately evident to the public watching this programme at home, the 'live' studio audience was predominantly made up of people who regularly attend such events (and, for this reason, unlikely to be 'representative' of a notional 'general' British public). It was also the case that this public was taught to perform in certain ways. Despite attending and later participating voluntarily the *spontaneity* and *authenticity* of this studio audience was at least partly mediated by those producing this programme. This bout of participation therefore not only substantiated the rather abstract idea that the 'reality' of reality television is in many ways a constructed reality. It also made me think further about how a specific set of performative, technological and material practices (as well as language and texts) mediate, elicit and constitute publics.

The third example is drawn from my experiences of participating in a series of 'local' London Social Forum meetings in the lead up to attending a much larger transnational (or translocal) European Social Forum gathering in Athens, Greece. Once again, the objective of participating in a series of London Social Forum meetings was to sensitise me as to how public participation in this 'movement of movements' was conducted, and to develop a better understanding of what research material might be available to me in this case study. Before attending the meetings, I had already made myself familiar with some of the academic research and other literature generated about the Social Forum movement. I had also familiarised myself with the World Social Forum's 'Charter of Principles' which details its aspirations and the ground rules of this 'movement of movements'. I was aware of reports that there had been a great deal of antipathy between members of the Socialist Workers Party and those who wished to operate outside of this group in a more 'horizontal' and less hierarchical or 'vertical' fashion in the lead up to the 3rd European Social Forum in London which was held a year earlier. However, I also knew prior to my initial bout of participant observation that the London Social Forum was not a SWP 'controlled' enterprise as I had attended, as an observer, the 3rd European Social Forum that was held in London in October 2004. However none of this quite prepared me for the experiences I had as a participant observer during the series of London Social Forum meetings.

Given that more than 20,000 people had attended the 3rd European Social Forum meeting in London in October 2004 I had expected the London Social Forum to be a fairly large grouping. I was rather surprised therefore when, on arriving at my first meeting in December 2005, I saw just 14 people in the room. I had not decided exactly how I was going to go about researching the 4th European Social Forum at that point so, when I introduced myself at the beginning of the meeting, I stated simply that I was a PhD student researching a number of different contemporary

forms of public participation in politics and wanted to explore the Social Forum as part of my study. I also stated, quite openly, that I had a personal interest in the Social Forum and was keen to find out if I might also be able to contribute in some way to the ongoing activities of the London group. The people I met on my arrival at the first London Social Forum meeting acted in a friendly and welcoming manner; there was no obvious leader to the group and the atmosphere seemed to be informal and non-hierarchical. For example, soon after I arrived I was involved in conversation with a small group sat down around a table, and only after a period of about 10 minutes (by which time more people had joined in) did I realise that the 'meeting' had started. It was only after another 15 minutes had passed that one member drew our attention to a pre-agreed 'agenda'.

This bout of participant observation was more intensive than that in the other two case study settings. I attended the main monthly London Social Forum meeting for seven months but also became involved in one of this organisation's small 'sub-groups' that was dedicated to engaging with and mobilising around issues of 'democracy'. During the time I was involved with the London Social Forum the proposal to extend the Mayor of London's powers were being consulted on, and those participating in this local Social Forum group agreed that, if more power was to be exercised by the London Mayor, this change needed to be accompanied by more direct forms of democracy that would also allow London's publics to exercise more political power for themselves. During the time I was undertaking my initial bout of participant observation a multi-pronged strategy was initiated to get this message across and engage the wider London public in this campaign. I actively contributed to the work of developing and helping to implement this campaign. The group relied heavily on debate and discussion to agree what to do and there were frequent and heated disagreements about a wide range of tactical, ideational and strategic issues. These discussions were creative, stimulating and productive on

many occasions. However, when there were conflicts, these had patterns with two or three individuals regularly locking horns. For my own part, during bouts of conflict I found myself taking up a range of positions, sometimes staying silent and thereby attempting to keep out of arguments between particular individuals, sometimes taking up a position of my own or backing up another participant or sometimes attempting to perform a mediation role.

Arriving at my fourth 'democracy sub-group' meeting, several months into my initial bout of engagement with the London Social Forum, I was told that the person who had agreed to chair that evening's meeting was not able to attend and one of the regular members invited me to chair the meeting instead. I accepted this invitation but later found out that one of the longstanding members of the group, for complicated historical reasons, was not happy about my performing this role and this later led to conflict within the group. However, I also witnessed and participated in many activities in which members of this group negotiated their differences, resulting in a series of imaginative and highly constructive debates over several months about democracy in London. I did therefore observe this group cooperating around as well as contesting these issues and was able to collaborate with them when it came to implementing a small-scale campaign for greater participative and direct democracy in London.

However, over the course of my initial spell as a participant observer I became increasingly concerned and ambivalent about my position and my participation in this group. The various disputes in which I became frequently entangled, required a great deal of time and energy to even keep up with, let alone ameliorate. And these disputes and the tense atmosphere that they generated made campaigning and other kinds of political activity increasingly treacherous, interpersonal undertakings. With a great sense of personal disappointment I began to recognise that I had

become involved in a set of relationships and activities that I no longer had the either the capacity or the desire to participate in so directly. Though I did eventually travel to the 4th European Social Forum meeting in Athens, Greece with a small group of London Social Forum members, after this event I initiated a process that led to my gradual withdrawal from this group.

The three sets of experiences described here generated two major challenges for this research. The first lay in the extent of the inconsistencies and instabilities that I had encountered in the presentation, and the performance of, and responses to, each initiative. Early evidence indicated that the publics addressed by and involved in these initiatives were volatile and in flux. These instabilities, I found, were particularly acute once attention was focused on three particular features of each initiative, namely:

- (i) the ways in which each was publicised;
- (ii) the ways in which each was constituted and structured as forms of public assembly;
- (iii) and, the ways in which participation in each was performed and responded to by those enrolled in them.

As a result of these early observations, I decided that it would be helpful to structure further empirical work around these three features and, in particular, around similarities and differences between the forms of publicness and modes of politics generated by these three forms of practice.

Re-engaging with the literature reinforced the notion that these three features might be of significance. Further reflection helped me to think more about the connections between the features and particular debates outlined in the literature. The work of Michael Warner (2002), for example, helped me to better understand the importance

of the publicity material I had begun to collect and, in particular, how publicity materials can work to socially construct publics, or, more specifically, simultaneously constitute, hail and enrol publics into forms of participation by instigating relations of call and response.

Engaging with the work of Bruno Latour (2005) and others who have taken a 'material turn' in their study of publicness and politics helped me begin to better understand and analyse the role that material, technical and, in particular, organisational practices might have on the constitution and elicitation of the publics in these initiatives.

Lastly, by engaging with authors working in the *governmentality* tradition such as Nikolas Rose (1999), Mitchell Dean (2002) and George Yudice (2003) I was able to begin to more clearly recognise how different participative technologies privilege, resource and thereby also work to legitimise particular forms of subjectivity and conduct over others. As a result I decided it would be important to study how those enrolled in the case study exercises took up or otherwise inhabited the subject positions and public roles they are offered.

I began to realise that a more systematic process of collecting and analysing material relating to each of these three key features (publicity, organisation and participant interaction) could enable (rather than collapse) apparent distinctions and relationships within and between these three different initiatives.

The second major challenge arising from these initial bouts of participant observation was how to deal with and represent my own role (as a PhD researcher) and my own biases (as a politically engaged subject). I realised that prior to these initial bouts of participant observation I had not sufficiently recognised my own

investments in certain forms of practice and particular political positions, and the impact that these commitments could potentially have on the research process. I had selected the three cases because they were accessible and fitted the criteria implied by the provisional public participation typology that I had generated.

However, I later realised I had also been attracted to this set of cases because they each seemed – at least according to some of their promotional materials – to be working to realise a form of participatory politics that interested me personally. I was personally engaged by the promise of a form of participatory politics geared to the re-distribution of political power (as in Porto Alegre's version of 'participatory budgeting' and the Harrow Open Budget itself), and excited by the possibilities offered by the 'new' media technologies and the forms of popular rather than 'elite' media culture suggested by Vote for Me. I also welcomed the opportunity to engage with a form of public participation generated from the 'bottom-up' and oriented towards certain forms of resistance, emancipation and transformation, as in the case of the Social Forum.

Operating as a participant observer, I had initially hoped to find a way of somehow supporting as well as researching these initiatives. However, as the research progressed my experiences resulted instead in rather ambivalent feelings around each initiative and these feelings had not always been hidden. As a result, my feelings had impacted on how I had performed. In turn my actions too had sometimes impacted on how others had engaged with me in these settings. This is a problem recognised in work on the reflexivity of the research process: for example, Massey argues that:

"If you take a position that the world out there, or more specifically your object of study, can speak back, that it too is an active agent in the process of research, then what is at issue is a real two-way engagement. Many imaginations of the field have pictured it as static [...] [a]

revision of that imaginary would make the field itself dynamic; and it would make fieldwork into a relation between two active agents. It would recognise it as a two-way encounter.”
(Massey 2004:86)

The settings with which I was beginning to engage had indeed ‘spoken back’ to me in different ways. This was especially so in the case of the Harrow Open Budget trial and during meetings of the London Social Forum, but also applied, in a different way, to my experiences of Vote for Me. One of the reasons I had initially been attracted to using a form of participant observation was because I had for some years before beginning this PhD worked as a ‘public participation’ practitioner and was used to being involved and directly contributing to the development of these kinds of practices. I was not, at first, used to, or indeed particularly sympathetic to, the idea of standing back and researching such practices in a less directly attached way. However, by attempting to observe, analyse and contribute *at the same time*, as part of a single form of research activity, I realised I had begun to experience for myself some of the complexities of this mode of engagement.

Attempts to deploy politically engaged forms of participation are of course not unprecedented. Peter Reason, for example, has written extensively about the potential of what he calls ‘action research’ and such methods have been widely applied especially in educational work (see Reason 2001); various feminist scholars have forged a range of approaches that work to operationalise various political ‘standpoints’ via their research practice (Haraway, 1998; Letherby, 2003); and anthropology (Clifford, 1997) and cultural studies (Gilbert, 2008) have each also generated a multiplicity of different forms of politically-engaged field-work or ethnography. Engaging with some of this work was useful in that it helped me to reflect further on how I might be able to refine my research design and locate this research. However, given the complicated power relations that I had begun to

recognise and the limited time and resources that were available to me, I decided, reluctantly, that it would not be feasible for me to continue to attempt to engage politically in any sustained or direct way *during* the enactment of the three initiatives.

This led me to explore what it might mean in practice adopt a more *detached* research approach. While initially I wondered about the effects that this change of approach might have on the public status of the research, on further reflection I recognised that it would be a mistake to offer one particular mode of enquiry – participant observation – a privileged political or moral status above all others. Other methods, I realised, also had the potential to deliver publicly-relevant and politically-engaged results, albeit in different ways. The challenge was to generate the research design that would most effectively achieve the particular aim of this study, doing so in a way that was manageable, and yield results that had some coherence and some relevance to a range of publics, academic research users, policy stakeholders and practitioners.

2.3 Reflexivity and the constitution and performance of publicness

The process I was embarking on had already stimulated three main forms of reflexivity: methodological reflexivity, reflexivity around the concept, constitution and performance of the public and reflexivity about the construction and enactment of politics. I began to realise that in order to undertake this project effectively I would need to continue to offer a central role to each of these forms of analytical practice. Recognising that there are competing claims on the concept of ‘reflexivity’ as it applies to the conduct of social constructivist research practice (Bruer and Roth,

2003), I realised it would be necessary to clarify the concepts and practices of reflexivity with which I needed to work.

I found some of Bourdieu's insights into this topic (1998, 1990) and a commentary on this aspect of Bourdieu's work by Swartz (1997) to be extremely useful when considering the problem of the researchers' 'public' position in a project of this kind. My project is also greatly indebted to the work of Michael Warner and in particular his 2002 volume *Publics and Counterpublics* as this book greatly enhanced my understanding of how the concept of reflexivity pertains to the study of publics. So before concluding this chapter by outlining how I collected and analysed my research material and how I generated and compared the three cases studies, I want briefly to touch on some of the key insights that I gleaned from Bourdieu and Warner respectively, and in particular to how each contributed to a concept and practice of what I will term, for the purposes of this research, *public reflexivity*.

Bourdieu argues that the scholastic gaze or view is fundamentally political since part of what it entails is a search for power (1988:8). Claims for the "best explanation" of the social world amount to a means of relativising other viewpoints and through these means assuming a kind of power over the intellectual world (ibid.). The temptation to adopt this position is inherent in the posture of the social researcher because the practice of conducting research – and the scholastic view more generally – both require a social and epistemological break from the realm of practice. Swartz goes on to argue that such a break is necessary to take up a detached or 'outsider' point of view, a view that 'objectifies' by translating and transforming 'practical knowledge' into 'theoretical knowledge' (Swartz, 1997:274). A reflexive practice requires the researcher to "objectify the very intention of objectifying" by submitting to critical examination "the very intellectual ambition" to achieve the *best* explanation (Swartz, 1997:275).

The focus here is not simply on the individual researcher but instead on the “position of the researcher in the field of struggle for scholarly recognition” (1997:275). For Bourdieu, Swartz argues, the need for both public involvement and intellectual detachment must be balanced one against the other. A reflexive research process is one that aims to bring to the surface not only ‘explanations’ but also knowledge of the conditions and practices through which explanations are generated (ibid.).

Despite his reservations about practices that *inevitably* objectify, Bourdieu remained ambitious about the value of ideas, theory and intellectual work. His aim was to raise awareness of what he calls “the intellectualist fallacy” which, he says, is to put into the minds of agents the researchers’ scholastic view (1990:382); or, phrased in another way, to attribute directly the concepts and theories generated by the researcher to the researched. In doing this, researchers elide both their own role (and responsibility) as *mediators* as well as the complex struggles for position and status in which they are inevitably embroiled when inhabiting the field of academia.

The key insight that I gained from my engagement with Bourdieu and Swartz was that it would be important to be critically aware of the objectifying moves undertaken during my research. Such moves were already traceable in the construction of the public participation typology (see tables 1-3) and have continued, in different guises, throughout this research process. The researcher’s privilege, according to Bourdieu, is to be afforded the time and space to be able to ‘detach’ or ‘withdraw’ from the fields of research and translate observations into theories of social practice. To be reflexive as part of this process means bringing the researcher’s public *and* intellectual responsibilities into a dynamic and dialectical relationship with each other by being critical about such movements, and by charting and highlighting them rather than disguising or otherwise obscuring them. By surfacing moves that

objectify, research findings become more provisional, less fixed and thereby potentially more open to ongoing development, public scrutiny and contestation. Though provisional, there is no reason why research findings of this kind cannot retain their value as *tools for thought*.

Bourdieu's ideas about what might constitute a publicly-accountable and reflexive researcher appealed to me. The idea of a research process that seeks to chart and account for its own objectifying practices (a process that operates through reflexive loops moving back and forth between different forms of concrete engagement and different levels of abstraction) was something that I aspired to undertake myself. Following the example of Bourdieu would require a commitment to work with the detail of the practices through which publics are constructed *and* a commitment to account for, reflect upon and theorise these practices. Bourdieu's work also stresses the importance of attempting to craft research work in ways that allows it to speak to its various publics, be they the research subjects of this research or practitioners and other academics with an interest in this area. Bourdieu's work calls, lastly, for the need to remain open to the possibility of revising research findings and theories in light of what is learnt by engaging the various publics of this research with research results.

Michael Warner is another theorist who helped me further reflect on and better understand the relationship between the concept of reflexivity and the concept of the public. In his 2002 volume *Publics and Counterpublics* Warner shows how publics are themselves reflexive entities. For Warner publics do not exist prior to their enactment in any straightforward way but rather come into existence through various forms of address and mediation. More precisely, publics are constituted through relations of call and response:

“[A] public might be real and efficacious, but its reality lies in [the] reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse which gives it existence” (Warner: 2002:67)

As Barnett (2007) observes, Warner’s theory underscores the temporality of performances of public action showing how each depends on establishing and re-establishing “relations of anticipation, projection, response and reply” (2007:9). Such activities, according to Warner, should not simply be understood as technical or mechanical but rather as largely *poetic* since, “all discourse or performance addressed to a public must characterise the world in which it attempts to circulate and must attempt to realise that world through address” (2002:114). Warner elaborates:

“Public discourse says not only ‘Let a public exist’ but ‘Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world this way’. Then it goes in search of confirmation that such a public exists, with greater or lesser success – success being further attempts to cite, circulate and realise the world understanding it articulates. Run it up the flagpole and see who salutes. Put on a show and see who turns up.” (2002:114)

At one level, then, the activity of summoning-up a public for participation, as Warner asserts here, works to articulate, identify and therefore also characterise the form that any subsequent public action will take. However, any call to act publicly is always also, according to Warner, reliant on a faith in the self-organising power of public action:

“Whether faith is justified or partly ideological, a public can only produce a sense of belonging and activity if it is self-organised [...] rather than through an external framework. [...] Belonging to a public seems to require at least minimal participation, even if it is patient or notional, rather than a permanent state of being.” (2002: 70-71)

For Warner then, what he calls the premise of self-organisation is essential to “the peculiar cultural artefact we call a public” (2002:72). This allure of self-organisation helps account for the political optimism that is often associated with at least the potential of public talk and action (ibid. 70). However, public entities are not nearly as straightforward as they are often supposed to be. This partly being because, at least according to Warner, as well as having concrete capabilities publics must be understood as inherently reflexive, circular and imaginary entities. These observations lead to Warner’s most radical insight: that publics are inherently unstable entities. Honing in on the moment at when public discourse elicits a response, Warner asserts that public relations of call and response should not be understood as relations of mere consecutiveness in time but instead as moments of *interaction*. In Warner’s own words, because:

“[...] public discourse commits itself in principle to the possible participation of any stranger. It therefore puts at risk the concrete world that is its given conditions of possibility. This is its fruitful perversity. [...] No form with such a structure could be very stable. [It] is an engine for (not necessarily progressive) social mutation.” (2002:113)

Warner’s characterisation of publics as “engines for (not necessarily progressive) social mutation” resonated with me strongly. It resonated with some of my initial empirical findings about the dynamism of public participation exercises. And it resonated with my political commitment to engaging, constructively, with public participation exercises as mediums of political action. Primarily, however, Warner’s theoretical approach alerted me to, and offered me ways of thinking about and analysing, some of the contradictory, reflexive and dialectical characteristics that I might now expect to come across when engaging with the publics of each of the three case study initiatives in more detail.

2.4 The generation and analysis of research materials and the construction of findings.

Having undertaken an initial period of empirical experimentation and theoretical reflection it was possible to produce the research design that would be used in the main phase of this project. By this point, a research aim and research objectives had been formulated and, using the public participation typology (table 3) to guide the process, three case studies had been selected. The final section of this chapter will now briefly describe how the case study research was conducted. Essentially, this process involved the following five activities:

- (i) the *identification* and *generation* of materials that pertained specifically to the three features of the initiatives around which the case studies would be developed (publicity, public assembly organisation and participant interaction) as well as sets of case specific background material;
- (ii) the *analysis* of the three different cases, particularly focusing on how publics are constituted and performed, and how far this performance might be understood in terms of the domain characteristics identified in the typologies;
- (iii) the *comparison of* the cases in order to explore relationships not just within but also between them;
- (iv) the *development of* conclusions and recommendations for further research;
- (v) the drafting, structuring and *presentation* of the analysis and its findings in chapter form.

The purpose of this research, as has already been stated, was not simply to pinpoint *what* particular publics were constituted and enacted by the three initiatives but to investigate *how* publicness is constructed, assembled and mobilised in these settings. It would be inappropriate to treat the data collected in these settings as transparent. Following the precepts of a social constructivist research tradition, this is because it would be necessary to view data performatively, as materials that have a role in the generation and ordering of particular *realities* and *effects* over others (Tonkiss, 2004:215-6).

The processes of data generation, analysis and findings generation were each therefore undertaken in an iterative and reflexive fashion. This meant that apart from starting with processes of data collection and ending with the final presentation of the research material in chapter form the five activities listed above were not always undertaken sequentially. Instead, the research process entailed repeated back and forth movements across and between data, already existing research and theoretical literatures and the development of analytical findings. While somewhat non-linear this approach was nevertheless still pursued to ensure that the research was thorough and systematic. This was important because, as noted by Brewer (2000:80-1), the three cases would only be amenable to comparison if they were each constructed and structured in a similar way.

Each of the three features selected for analysis (publicity; public assembly; participant interaction) required a separate method of data collection and analysis, though the actual substance of the data differed slightly in different case study sites (see table 4, below; and for a more detailed version of this specifying, case-by-case, the data that was collected, generated, reviewed and eventually selected for analysis in the case study chapters see appendix 1).

Feature	Data sources	Mode of analysis
Publicity	Publicity materials: websites, press releases, media articles, event programmes / guides.	Discourse analysis
Public assembly	Floor plans (HOB, ESF), photographs (HOB, ESF), notes generated during and after bouts of participant observation (HOB, VFM and ESF), video recording (VFM), transcript of video recording.	Participant observation and discourse analysis of notes and visual records.
Participant interactions	Transcripts of discussions (HOB) Video recording (VFM) Notes (ESF)	Participant observation and discourse analysis of documents, transcripts and ethnographic notes.
Context	'Grey' literature and background interviews with participants and organisers.	Discourse analysis of texts and interview transcripts.

Table 4: Data sources and modes of analysis

To investigate *publicity*, I gathered together page grabs of the initiatives websites (Harrow Open Budget and 4th European Social Forum), press releases (Vote for Me); and media articles (Harrow Open Budget, Vote for Me and 4th European Social Forum). The material that related to practices of *assembly organisation* was rather different in that some of it consisted of 'official' documents such as floor plans (Harrow Open Budget), timetables (Harrow Open Budget and 4th European Social

Forum) or documents that mapped the site's layout (4th European Social Forum). This was supplemented by additional material such as notes, photographs (Harrow Open Budget, 4th European Social Forum and video material (Vote for Me) generated or recorded during the time that was spent observing each of the three events. Material that related to the third and final feature to be investigated – participant interaction – again differed across the case study sites. For the Harrow Open Budget it was possible to draw on a copy of an official transcript that recorded a large number of extracts from participants' 'deliberations'. In the case of Vote for Me I made my own transcript of the show by repeatedly watching my video recording of it, and noting what different participants said and did over the course of the programme. The record I made of participants' responses during my attendance of the 4th European Social Forum draws on notes generated while talking to or observing fellow participants.

In addition to material linked with the constitution and enactment of these three features of the initiatives, I also collected a range of background materials that helped with the analysis of each case. This took the forms of interview data (a small number of semi-structured and unstructured interviews were undertaken) and the collection of academic and grey literature. This material was vital to the study for two reasons: first I knew that it was important not to somehow present these initiatives as fully bounded entities or events that were simply the result of the three features on which I was focusing. There was strong empirical evidence from the outset that doing so would be inappropriate and I therefore set out to find ways of making connections between these events and wider and pre-existing ideas, practices and organisational and social relationships and dynamics. The second related reason was that I recognised the inherent theoretical importance of relating each case study to the wider contemporary processes through which they were mediated and formed. By setting each case in context I attempted to overcome "the narrow gaze

of some forms of ethnography and the over-determinism of some forms of discursive work” (Newman, 2007: 56-7).

In this study then, the results of a discourse-analytical approach are brought into relation with the results from bouts of participant observation. Using discourse analysis helped direct analytical attention not only on specific texts but also on contexts: as Chouliaraki notes, “[t]he term discourse refers precisely to the capacity of meaning-making resources to constitute social reality, forms of knowledge and identity within specific social contexts and power relations” (Chouliaraki, 2007:674). Participant observation afforded me the opportunity to observe some of the contradictory, contested and unstable sets of ways in which social relations are played out in specific concrete settings through different discursive and material practices. The resulting accounts of this twin strategy are ‘thicker’ (Geertz, 1973) and therefore also *richer* in descriptive content than it would have been possible to provide by analysing documents alone.

The process of comparing the three cases was as critical to this project as the process of generating the cases in the first place. The process of comparison, however, gave rise to two main challenges. The first was to find a way of discussing the three cases without either reifying or collapsing relationships of difference or similarity between them; and the second was to find ways of speaking to, or, at least being relevant to, publics beyond those directly concerned with each of the three initiatives. The approach that was eventually used to overcome these two challenges focused on drawing out a set of *dynamics* that appeared to be common to the three cases. This enabled me to highlight some of the different ways that each of these dynamics was articulated in each of the three cases; and then to pinpoint some of the reasons why these modes of articulation were in certain senses contingent. The aim was to foreground some of the *particular* factors that

account for these initiatives being enacted in the way that they were; but, at the same time, to keep open the idea that these dynamics could – at least potentially – produce a variety of forms of public performance and political action beyond those enacted in these specific cases.

This approach also, inevitably, had its own set of limitations. Despite a large volume of different kinds of data being collected and generated the amount of material I have been able to engage with has been more limited than I had initially hoped it would be. Part of the reason for this was my decision to focus closely on three specific features of each case study. This meant that the description and analysis of materials was confined within certain limits. I also had to be highly selective in the data I decided to analyse. In making this selection I decided to focus on data sources that appeared to yield the richest material. This process of selection was iterative, with initial sweeps of the data informing and serving to sharpen the focus of subsequent sweeps and directing the search for new literature that could also assist with this process of final selection and analysis.

Despite the care taken with these practices of data selection and analysis, it is important to underline that this research process has been exploratory in nature. The status of the research findings and therefore the knowledge that has been constructed are therefore provisional. If this is a shortcoming, it needs to be balanced against the innovative nature of this project. Novelty has no inherent value of course. However, if the slightly unconventional character of this research can serve in some small way to open up new research agendas and elicit (or even simply contribute to) new conversations, then it will have been worthwhile. Driving this work from the beginning has been a desire to facilitate greater reflexivity around the concept and practice of publicness, not just my own reflexivity of course but that of a wider range of (already existing or emergent) publics. Any such process is not

likely to be smooth or have a clear end-point. The aspiration, nevertheless, is that this study makes a contribution to this process.

...

This chapter has set out the challenges I faced in developing a research design for this thesis, and some of the ways in which I have attempted to overcome them. I have shown how the three orientations to public participation traced in Chapter 1 served as a stimulus towards the decision to adopt a case study approach, and traced the steps I took in selecting my three case studies. I also traced some of the issues raised during my initial experience of engaging with each case study site, and how this led me to thinking about how to manage questions of reflexivity in the research process. This initial engagement also led to a decision to focus on three particular features of each of the initiatives to be studied: the ways in which each was publicised; how each was structured as a form of assembly; and how participation was performed and responded to in each site.

These three features formed entry points into the case studies, enabling me to decide what data to collect and how to focus my analysis (see table 4). Each also enabled me to develop my research objectives into a set of three rather more specific **research questions**:

- which normative categories of both publics and politics are privileged in the publicity material?
- which normative categories of both publics and politics are inscribed in the design and performance of the assembly itself?

- how are these and other forms of publicness and politics translated, negotiated, articulated or contested through participant interactions?

By addressing each of these questions in the case study chapters that follow I hope to illuminate key features of each case in a way that will help me to address my overall research aim and objectives. However, drawing on recent understandings of research that have been developed in the discipline of anthropology, my approach was oriented not simply towards the understanding of the 'local' or particular discrete 'fields' represented by each case study, but also was committed to engaging with these ostensibly different and local settings comparatively and to addressing relations between them. This represents a commitment to exploring epistemological, performative and political "issues of location" (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 39).

To do this I use this process to analyse and then compare how the set of three initiatives that I explore in the chapters that follow are set-up, located and constructed in practice. Each case study chapter (chapters 3-5) is, to this end, structured in an identical way, beginning with an attempt to locate the specific initiative in a wider field and then, following this, engaging with, in turn, each of the three features of each initiative that I have decided to focus on. The overview chapters that follow the case studies (chapters 6 and 7) then attempt to compare and relate the ideas and practices brought into view in each case.

Chapter 3

Harrow Open Budget

“Tell the council where to stick its money”

(Slogan used to promote Harrow Open Budget on various publicity materials,
October 2005)

Harrow Open Budget was an exercise apparently corresponding to the *deliberative* ideal of public participation, and an example of a *governmental* initiative (see table 3 in the previous chapter for how this fits into the overall research design). This initiative invited its participants to challenge conventional ways of engaging with the local council’s decision-making process by engaging directly in its budget setting process. As such it opened up forms of publicness and political practice that differed from the conventions of local representative democracy. The centrepiece of this initiative was a half-day public assembly that, in October 2005, involved over 220 local residents assembling for nearly six hours in the main sports hall of Harrow’s municipal leisure centre in North London.

Before engaging with the detailed empirical work, I want to locate this initiative in a context that illustrates how Harrow Open Budget drew on, translated and combined a range of pre-existing ideas and practices. Source materials for my observations and analysis include an interview with a key actor involved in the development of this exercise, press reports, publicity material and other documents generated by the exercise, ethnographic notes generated via observations I made while attending this event and a search of ‘grey literature’ promulgating and commenting on participative budgeting.

The Harrow Open Budget project was generated and championed by two Harrow Councillors. One of these was part of the Labour group in office in Harrow at the time and the other was a backbench Independent Councillor. The Independent Harrow Councillor also held the position of Clerk to a separate entity named the Power Inquiry. The Power Inquiry was a two-year 'Independent Inquiry into Britain's Democracy' funded jointly by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust. The Inquiry was set up "to explore, through public engagement, research and a high profile commission, the causes of our [political] disillusionment and examine new approaches to political participation" (homepage of Power Inquiry, accessed February 2006). While Harrow Council was the organisation that funded the Harrow Open Budget, it was the Power Inquiry that was commissioned by this Council to organise and facilitate this event.

Harrow Council, as will be shown in more detail in section 3.1, promoted Harrow Open Budget as a means through which Harrow's residents could be engaged with both the 2006/7 Council budgetary decision making process and the process of generating local public policy. Harrow Council contracted out the management of the event to the Power Inquiry which provided distinct bodies of expertise but also a political commitment to enhance participation as a means of promoting democratic renewal in the UK. The Power Inquiry publicised this initiative by promoting the main assembly event as an "experiment" that could help "really get to grips" with how recent democratic innovations from around the world "could be applied in a British context" (Giddy, 2005:24). For the Power Inquiry, this event therefore possessed a national as well as local significance and was later referenced in their final report (Power Inquiry, 2006:228) as a case study that demonstrated how successful deliberative public participation exercises could be in a UK setting. The Harrow Open Budget can also be situated amongst a multiplicity of other UK local government experiments with forms of participative politics (Barnes, McCabe and

Ross, 2004; Barnes, Newman and Sullivan, 2007; Lowndes and Stoker, 1998). Two further examples that took place in the same year as Harrow Open Budget include an initiative called 'Keighley Decision Day', organised by Bradford Strategic Local Partnership (also known as 'Bradford Vision') and an initiative called 'The Village Spend' in Coedpoeth, North Wales (for further details on these as well as other recent and current participatory budgeting initiatives in the UK see the website of the Participatory Budgeting Unit).

In these contexts Harrow Open Budget can be seen to relate not only to the work of a local council in London but also to the work of a charity-funded non-governmental organisation (the Power Inquiry) and to certain sets of policy reforms brought in by the New Labour government. The Power Inquiry also situated the Open Budget initiative alongside a multiplicity of recent international 'democratic innovations' (see Power Inquiry report *Beyond the Ballot: Democratic Innovations from Around the World* by Smith, 2005). So, for example (as will be highlighted in section 3.1 and 3.2), while the agenda for this event was crafted in a way that made it relevant to the specificities of local government politics in Harrow, the forms of public appeal and types of assembly technologies that were deployed in this setting worked to translate and combine notions of politics and participatory public practice generated as far away as Brazil.

"The suburban semis and straw boaters of Harrow, in North London, don't immediately come to mind when you think of the participatory budgeting pioneered in Porto Alegre, in Brazil. But the association will soon be less surreal [...] Harrow Council has just launched its own version of the city's participatory budget"

('Just Like Watching Brazil', Pam Giddy, Red Pepper, October 2005, p24)

The idea of a participatory budgeting process, clearly invoked by naming this initiative the 'Open Budget', links this Harrow initiative to the original Porto Alegre

experiment that pioneered techniques through which local people could become involved in setting municipal budgetary and policy priorities. The variety of techniques known generically as ‘participatory budgeting’ are however a much more diffuse and widespread set of practices that have since been translated and adapted in more than 20 countries globally (see Wampler, 2007 for a discussion of some of these adaptation processes). It is important to recognise processes of translation because they highlight how governmental and non-governmental actors have set about adapting the ‘original’ Porto Alegre approach while, at the same time, often continuing to invoke the radical and authentic ‘spirit’ of Porto Alegre. For example, describing the design process that led to the Harrow Open Budget approach, Pam Giddy, the Power Inquiry’s Director, writing in the magazine Red Pepper remarks:

“The process we have come up with is not a direct replica of that used in Porto Alegre. What might be appropriate to a city in the developing world, might not work in London. [...] We have designed a process that borrows from a number of different experiments”

(‘Just Like Watching Brazil’, Pam Giddy, Red Pepper, October 2005, p.24)

What is notable about this extract is how Giddy constructs a certain understanding of London as a place, a place that is constituted here as more ‘developed’ than Porto Alegre. In this way, the approach to participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre is rendered unsuitable for London because the approach itself, like Porto Alegre, is not sufficiently developed or sophisticated for ‘replication’ in London. Given the assembly design that was utilised in Harrow, this line of reasoning is significant: if compared to the Porto Alegre approach, the Harrow Open Budget approach could, on the basis of the arguments I will set out, be seen to have been a *less* rather than *more* developed form of participatory politics. The aim of this chapter is not to compare these two versions of ‘participatory budgeting’ but rather to highlight the various means through which this form of practice was positioned as a

‘development’ from the forms of politics and public engagement that were already established practice in local government in Harrow.

Another of the ways in which this event performed its newness was through the deployment of a particularly ‘high-tech’ approach to public engagement. This approach was itself borrowed and translated, not from techniques developed in Porto Alegre, but from an approach to public engagement called America Speaks (see www.americaspeaks.org) used extensively in North America. Also known as 21st Century Town Meetings, this approach, like Harrow Open Budget, utilises high-tech facilitation technologies. Such an approach in America has enabled hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of people to convene and deliberate upon public policy issues. While the America Speaks approach offers certain efficiencies, this process does not have a track record of allowing participants to exercise power to the same degree as the Porto Alegre process.

One way of understanding the design of Harrow Open Budget therefore is it being a process entailing a particular set of translations and design innovations. These processes themselves work to generate rhetorical uplift for the initiative. The technology deployed in Harrow, however, worked to position and channel participants in particular ways. As will also be shown in section 3.2, this did not mean that participants themselves always fitted into or followed this new scheme. It did ultimately, however, result in a process that privileged those voices and those results that were in step with this local authority’s pre-existing outlook and established public policy planning procedures.

While many of the key elements of the main Harrow Open Budget event situated this venture amongst sets of pre-existing local, national or international political changes and experiments, there were other elements that worked to relate this

event to less ostensibly political forms of practice. When participants were invited to vote (an activity that will be shown in section 3.2 of this chapter to have been a key part of the Harrow Open Budget event) they were given 10 seconds to cast their votes and this was accompanied by a dimming of the main lights and a soundtrack of loud pop music. To round off the sequence of activities strung-together for this event, participants were collectively invited to take part in a trivia quiz testing their knowledge of locally born celebrities. And, while positioned as ‘volunteers’, participants were also paid a fee of £25 to attend.

One justification given by an organiser of the Harrow Open Budget for the decision to pay participants was that this event required people to “give up their time” and their “expertise”; another was that this payment offered an “incentive”, especially for “young people”. The design of the event itself which integrated music, changes to lighting effects and changes of tempo was, according to this same respondent, explained by the fact that it was approached as a piece of “TV production”, drawing on the Director of the Power Inquiry’s experience as “a TV producer for [BBC’s] Newsnight” (quotes sourced from transcript of interview with Adam Lent, clerk to the Power Inquiry, Independent Harrow Councillor and co-organiser of Harrow Open Budget conducted 23/01/06).

Section 3.1 of this chapter explores the normative categories of politics and the public that were constituted via Harrow Open Budget’s publicity material; section 3.2 addresses the same question by examining the design and performance of the assembly at which publics were invited to deliberate on budgetary options; and section 3.3 then reflects on how these forms of publics and politics were negotiated and contested in participant interactions, focusing in particular on how participants used the resources they were offered during this assembly event. The chapter concludes by returning to the research objectives, highlighting different conceptions

of publics and politics and the ways in which these were articulated in the publicity, staging and performance of Harrow Open Budget.

3.1 Publicising Harrow Open Budget

This section addresses the core research objectives through an analysis of the initiative's website, used to publicise and communicate the details of this initiative and as a medium through which residents could sign-up as prospective participants for the main Harrow Open Budget assembly event. The website showed two distinct understandings of publicness and participative politics, and suggested ways in which they would be articulated with each other.

The first of these understandings promoted the idea that Harrow Open Budget would enable bottom-up, self-organised, open-ended and potentially transformative forms of publicness and public action. This was a form of participatory politics that would enable local residents to override or side-step elected Councillors and local authority 'bureaucracy' and, in this way, represent themselves. The second of these understandings suggested by this material constituted residents as a unified, or at least potentially unifiable whole: an entity, or 'community' that this Council represents, speaks and acts on behalf of. Participatory politics, according to this second understanding, is a process by which this public is *drawn into* Council-established institutions and practices instead of circumventing them; invited to act as partners in the fine-tuning of policies. While the first of these understandings will be shown to have been privileged over the second in this publicity material, their co-existence means that a set of tensions were inscribed into the way in which Harrow Open Budget was presented.

There were four main sections to the Harrow Open Budget website: its homepage, a section titled 'What's up for discussion?' (that itself had a series of subsections); a section titled 'Who we are'; and a section titled 'How do I get involved?'. My analysis will proceed by exploring the key elements of the homepage – the most prominent page of the website – and then by briefly analysing each of the other sections. The three elements on the homepage were: an icon; the initiative's logo; and a short piece of text. Each worked in an affective as much as in an explanatory register. For this reason it is important to highlight not only the individual characteristics of these elements but also some of the ideas and feelings that were evoked up by bringing these three elements together on this page. Starting with the textual element, this announced on the homepage:

"Harrow Council spends hundreds of millions of pounds of your taxes each year. This money goes on things that affect your life every single day. Your schools. Your care for the elderly. Your parks. Your transport and car parking. Your street cleaning and rubbish collection. Your security and crime prevention.

Isn't it time, you had a say over how and where this money is spent? On 23rd October 2005, you can. Hundreds of people will come together to tell Councillors what their priorities are for next year's Council spending.

You don't need to know anything about local government budgets or accounting. You just need to know what local issues matter to you and how they could be improved.

It's *your* Harrow, it's *your* money – have *your* say!"

(Homepage of Harrow Open Budget website, accessed October 2005, italics in original)

Adjacent to this text were two other elements that were presented to viewers of the homepage, the initiative's logo and its icon. These elements (shown below) were

used to brand this initiative and thereby generate a consistent identity across its other publicity material and documentation.



Figure 2: Logo and icon used to promote Harrow Open Budget, October 2005

These three elements together suggest a range of different ideas and practices that will be explored later. However, what is significant about this page is not just what is there but what is not; in particular the absence of any mention or any sign of Harrow Council's identity. Without this, those viewing the homepage would not be able to ascertain that the primary sponsor of the Open Budget initiative was in fact Harrow Council. Instead viewers would see, first, an icon of a small child apparently imploring members of Harrow's public to: "Tell the council where to stick its money"; secondly, a logo that emphasises that this initiative will be 'OPEN' above all else; and finally, the short piece of text (shown above) stating that "It's *your* Harrow" and that the "hundreds of million pounds" that Harrow Council spends each year is "*your* money" and that "hundreds of people" will be coming together on 23rd October because it is time "you had your say over how and where this money is spent".

Viewed alone and without exploring the rest of this website, the contents of this page summon up the look and the feel of a popular social movement campaign rather than what might be expected from a local Council initiative. One of the reasons for this is that each of the three elements, in different ways, constitute the idea that the 'Open Budget' represents a *departure* from the kinds of Council-related political practices that have preceded this venture. The text works to suggest that this event will address an historical imbalance of power between this council and its public. The logo works to invoke the idea that this budget-making exercise will be 'OPEN' and generated through a transparent, inclusive and publicly organised process rather than a closed, elitist or council-organised process. The icon suggests to members of Harrow's public that now is the time to unite and wrest control of economic resources from this local authority.

These elements at least allude to the possibility that the Harrow Open Budget event could facilitate a more bottom-up, self-organised and publicly controlled form of political action, one that has hitherto been unavailable in this locality. The way the 'O' in the 'HARROW OPEN BUDGET' doubles as the symbol of a key in this logo suggests that this initiative might allow participants the opportunity to exercise power over this budget-making process. The concept of openness invoked here perhaps alludes to the idea that the agenda of this event – beyond its focus on budgetary decision-making – might not be completely determined in advance. Combined, these elements could be construed as suggesting a form of politics that could be conducted on this public's own terms; a form of participatory practice that could (or would) enable different local residents to side-step or perhaps even override elected Councillors and Council bureaucracy by organising, representing and taking decisions for themselves in an autonomous way.

Given the slightly tongue-in-cheek character of the appeal made by the icon, the publicity material is also suggestive of the idea that Harrow Open Budget could be a fun, or at least less formal, less difficult or a less complicated form of politics than has previously been available to Harrow residents. Taken together with the ideas summoned up by the other elements on this page, these associations also work together to generate a popular and egalitarian mode of public address. This said, none of the practical details about how this initiative will actually be organised are provided on the homepage. For this information, users are required to click through to the pages below.

Clicking through to a section of the website titled 'What's up for discussion?' it is immediately evident that there is both substantially more text on this page than on the homepage and that the style of the prose is less provocative and popular in tone. While those accessing the homepage are immediately invited to 'tell the council where to stick its money', the two sentences that the statement on this page begins with are:

"The Assembly occurs at a key stage in the strategy and budget setting process of Harrow Council. In August and September Directorates start to draft what are called 'High Level service Plans'. These lay out the broad options and priorities for the coming years."

('What's up for discussion?' section of Harrow Open Budget website, accessed October 2005)

The homepage summons up the idea that that the Harrow Open Budget initiative could potentially reverse what is presented as a set of historically unjust relations of power between Harrow's public and its Council. One click through the website later, viewers are presented with the idea that it will be Harrow Council rather than its public that will be managing this event. Outlining how this initiative will relate to pre-existing Council structures, procedures and milestones, the change of tone and

emphasis is further confirmed over the course of the rest of the 'What's up for discussion?' section of this site.

Rather than being given the somewhat autonomous-sounding opportunity to participate in an event whose agenda is "open", this page states that those attending the Assembly will be presented with "sets of options" generated as a result of "close participation" between council officers and the Harrow councillors "who set the political priorities". While these options will be "wide enough in scope to present real choice" this webpage states that they will also be "detailed enough so that the public can make informed choices and understand the various constraints within which the council operates". While the exact details of what will be discussed at this event are not disclosed on this page, it does state that 'education', 'social services' and what it calls 'clean and green' would be the kinds of issues likely to be on the agenda of the 'Open Budget' assembly.

"The assembly will be presented with some hard choices", this page explains, "but the independent organisers of Harrow Open Budget, the Power Inquiry, will ensure that the options are fair". While there is no detail about precisely how the council envisages using the outcomes of this public participation exercise, the page does announce, albeit rather opaquely, that Harrow council "have agreed to use the results of the Harrow Open Budget process in *their* budgetary decision making process" [italics added].

The elements of the 'What's up for Discussion?' page highlighted above clearly invoke and construct different ideas of public participation and politics than those that were presented on this website's homepage. The form of participative politics

implied here does not problematise the authority or relations of power between the council and its public to anything like the degree of the text on the homepage. Neither does this text work to distance this initiative from the Council's pre-existing ways of doing things. On the contrary the text on this page works to enumerate all the different ways in which councillors and council officers, rather than Harrow's public, will be managing the agenda and the facilitation of the event. While the page does state that assembly participants would be asked to make "trade-offs and decisions", the approach to public involvement presented on this page explains that it will do this by engaging participants with options that have been constructed in advance by council officers and councillors. This would therefore seem to be a form of public involvement operating within certain 'constraints' and a form of engagement designed to assist the council with 'their' work.

These constraints, at least as they are described on this page, are constraints that are not simply of this Council's own making. The text announces, "there is likely to be much less money from central government than in previous years, yet at the same time outgoings continue to increase". "This means the assembly will need to help find areas to make savings, as well as to identify areas for new initiatives or changes to services". While the agency of Harrow's publics will need to be constrained by its Council, the agency of the Council itself is constrained, we learn, by resource limitations put in place by policies imposed by national government. Where a bottom-up mode of public governance is celebrated on the website's homepage, one click later we encounter a more hierarchical and top-down sounding mode of politics.

Clicking through to the page titled, 'How will this assembly work?' a further set of constraints are presented to prospective participants. While a general and all

encompassing appeal to the publics of Harrow to get involved is made on the home-page, on this particular page it is announced that a maximum of 300 Harrow residents will be able to participate in this venture. But, to take part, they will need to be available between 12.30 and 18.00 on Sunday the 23rd October 2005. This was not all, since, “given the large amount of taxpayer’s money that it [Harrow Council] spends”, the page states, “it is important that the Assembly is as representative of the people of Harrow as possible”. “With this in mind”, the page continues, “applicants will be selected by lot to sit on the Assembly in order to ensure that the Borough’s ethnic, age and disability mix is represented”. On a further page titled, ‘Who will be selected, and how?’ a table is presented which “gives an idea of the representative mix that the Power Inquiry is hoping to achieve at the Assembly”. This table is reproduced below with numbers and proportions based on census data:

	<u>300 Participants</u>
Gender	145 men
	155 women
Geography	14 people from each of the 21 wards
Age	21 in 16-19 range
	133 in 20-44 range
	89 in 45-64 range
	57 in 65+ range
Ethnicity	177 white
	24 Asian (excluding Chinese and Indian)
	66 Indian
	21 Black
	12 Chinese and other

(Harrow Open Budget website, accessed October 2005)

Harrow’s public is presented, in this table, as a population whose differences are constituted along gender, geographic, age and ethnic lines. Forms of representation

based on party politics are supplanted by, or at least subordinated to, notions of representation based on the idea that the presence and numbers of particular identity groups attending the assembly must be proportionate to those residing in this particular territory. The webpage states that the “300 selected” through these means will be “representative of the people and views in Harrow”. While therefore constitutive of a form of identity politics, (or perhaps a ‘politics of presence’ cf. Philips, 1995) this approach to public representation is also constitutive of an approach that takes ideological differences to be irrelevant, or at least unimportant to the operation of this exercise.

Through these means the protagonists organising this exercise, namely Harrow Council and the Power Inquiry, are rendered as impartial and neutral technicians or facilitators rather than actors with their own partisan or ideological concerns. This way of constituting ‘the Council’ as an impartial enabler of public participation is, therefore, quite different to the way it was portrayed on the website’s homepage where ‘the Council’ is portrayed as a reactionary agent blocking and misrepresenting Harrow’s public.

This identity change is important since it allows the organisers of Harrow Open Budget to be positioned as mediators rather than partisan political actors. It also allows this exercise in public participation to be portrayed as an initiative that will enable or facilitate, rather than act on behalf of, those who participate in this event. Furthermore this move allows those managing this process to present the exercise as a way of mediating between the demographically ‘representative’ public recruited to participate in this process and the partisan public representatives elected as councillors through the electoral process.

Harrow Open Budget would seem to be an exercise that articulated two rather different ideas of publicness and political participation. The first of these was the bottom-up, self-organised, anti-elitist, informal, indeterminate ideas of politics and publicness invoked and promoted on the website's homepage. The second, evident in the rest of the webpages analysed above, was an idea of publicness and politics that was much more council-led, top-down and instrumental. These ideas were articulated with each other by positioning the Harrow Open Budget as an exercise in mediation that would enable a representative public to engage with the council's pre-existing policy and budgetary decision-making processes in ways that would be more transparent and engaging and offer them 'a say'.

To further explore what this meant in the setting of the main public assembly event itself, the next section of this chapter traces how these ideas were translated into the design and management of the Harrow Open Budget public assembly.

3.2 Designing and enacting Harrow Open Budget

This section draws on and analyses a set of documents given to those enrolled to participate in the Harrow Open Budget assembly, together with a set of notes based on my own observations as a participant observer. Using these resources to describe and begin to reflect on the techniques and technologies used to design, organise and manage this undertaking, my aim here is to identify how the forms of

publicness and participatory politics highlighted in the publicity material were or were not translated into forms of public assembly practice.

The main Harrow Open Budget event, the Harrow Open Budget Assembly, took place on Sunday 23 October 2005 in the main sports hall of Harrow municipal leisure centre. This was a large space that for the event had been transformed by the Power Inquiry team into a high-tech public meeting environment. By the time the doors of the sports hall were opened at 12.15, some 15 minutes later than advertised, large queues of people had formed outside. Once admitted, they were asked to check-in and register and given a name badge and information-pack. The main part of the hall's floor space was taken up by 30 round banqueting tables and attendees were allocated to these tables randomly to ensure a mix of age, race and geography at each table. An 'independent' facilitator was also seated at each table of 10 participants.

Included in each information pack was a 'timetable' listing and scheduling the 15 different activities organised as part of the Harrow Open Budget assembly event. Most of this schedule concerned a series of discussion and voting activities related to five public policy 'topics': 'waste'; 'congestion'; 'adult social care'; 'youth services'; and 'safety'. A full-colour Discussion Guide booklet – also provided as part each participant's pack – laid-out further information about each of the different discussion topics. This booklet offered participants background information on the main 'challenges' relating to each of these areas of public policy in Harrow and presented between two and five 'options' for addressing each of these areas of public policy. On the double-page spreads on which each of these public policy challenges and options were presented, there was also a set of sub-headings listing the 'pros', 'cons' and 'costs' associated with each of the different options.

As well as the 30 tables that were laid out across the main area of the sports hall, a low stage had been erected at the front of the hall (see figure 3, below). Behind the stage, on the wall, a very large banner had been hung with the Harrow Open Budget logo emblazoned on it. Above this, and high up on each side of the hall, were three large display screens. The 'Open Budget' logo was projected onto these screens as participants arrived and was also on display on a series of large banners at floor level around the perimeter of the area in which the tables were arranged. Once all participants had been seated they were welcomed by the host and 'lead facilitator' Pam Giddy, the Director of the Power Inquiry, who appeared on the stage holding a wireless microphone. Next to the stage at floor level was a long desk on which a number of computer terminals and laptops were arranged.



Figure 3: The Harrow Open Budget assembly, 23 October 2005

The table-based facilitators were each provided with a laptop computer, and each participant was given their own handheld keypad device (see figure 4, below). All of this technology was connected 'wirelessly' and, as the various discussions proceeded, facilitated a range of information possessing and feedback activities. So, for example, from 1.30pm the Assembly discussed the topic of 'waste'. To do this

each table was invited to read the pages in the Discussion Guide booklet relating to the 'challenge' of 'reducing the amount of waste we produce' and to review the options for dealing with them including the 'pros', 'cons' and 'costs' associated with each. Having done this participants were invited to discuss this area of public policy and deliberate on the different options available to them and, if they wanted to, think of any additional options they might be able to offer. During the 30 minutes allocated to this and the other four discussion topics, the job of the 'independent facilitators' at each of the 30 tables was to keep these activities running to time and to ensure each participant had 'an equal chance of being heard'.



Figure 4: Facilitation technologies used during the Harrow Open Budget

Using a laptop computer (see figure 4, above), each table-facilitator was given the task of recording the different comments participants made about each of the policy options presented to them in the Discussion Guide while recording details of any 'additional options' participants suggested. Each time the table-based facilitators entered a comment or additional option into the laptop, it was relayed to the set of computers arrayed on the desk adjacent to the stage, at the front of the hall.

Members of the Power Inquiry team could then review all the different comments fed into the system by the table facilitators spread around the hall (see figure 4, below).

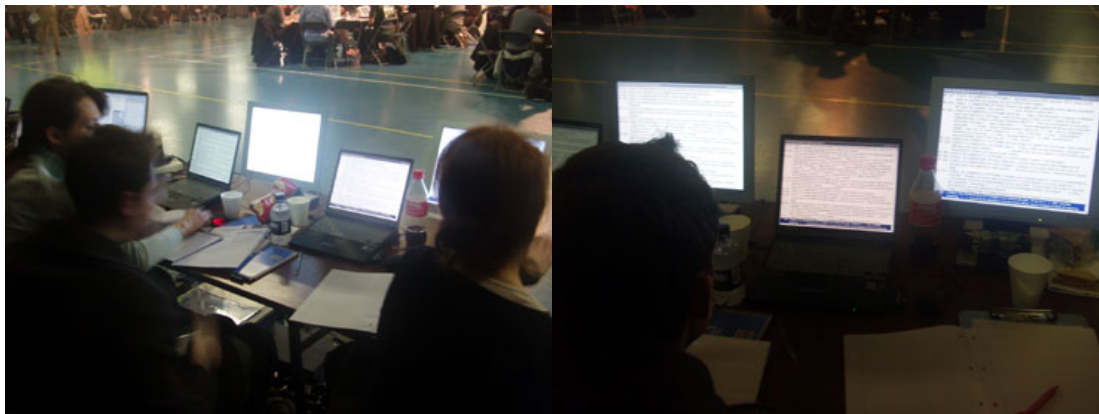


Figure 5: Power Inquiry staff reviewing comments recorded by table facilitators

Through this technology the Power Inquiry team were able to collect a vast array of comments and additional options relating to the various policy challenges around which these discussions were organised. The Power Inquiry team sat adjacent to the stage and so were able to feed host and lead facilitator Pam Giddy highlights of the different table-level discussions. At the end of each of these discussions Pam Giddy returned onto the stage and, using her microphone, fed back to all those assembled, extracts from the different discussions, adding comments of her own to some of the points that had been made.

Participants were then invited to vote on each of the different options listed in the discussion guide. Polling activities were highly orchestrated, requiring the coordination of the 300 participants, their handheld devices, the computer operators adjacent to the stage, the two sound and lighting operators situated at the back of the hall and the three large screens mounted on the walls around the hall. When the

time came for a vote, the large screens were used to display the different options on which participants were asked to vote. Participants were invited to rate these options from 1-9 by pressing buttons on their handheld computer devices (see figure 7, below). However, to do this they had to wait until they were given the signal from Pam Giddy, who then announced that participants would be given only a 10 second time slot to rate each of the policy options.

On her cue the main lights in the hall were dimmed, loud pop music played out of the loudspeakers arranged around the hall and an icon on each of the screens showed the 10-second time allocation quickly counting down. After each of the 10-second polling periods had passed, the music stopped, the lights went up and the results of these polls were projected onto the big screens around the hall (see figure 7, below). Using this system, the polling results could be generated and fed back to participants almost instantaneously.

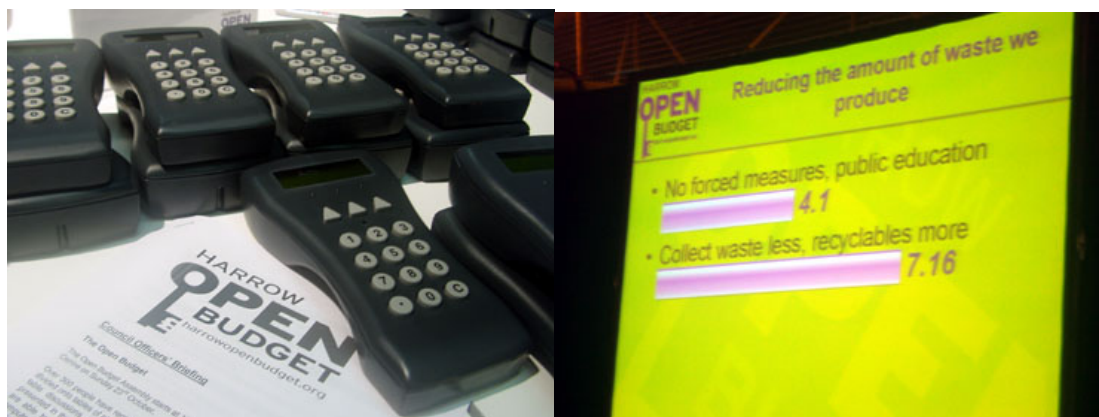


Figure 7: Voting at the Harrow Open Budget assembly

Participants were invited, as part of their overall deliberations around each option, to consider the cost attached to each of the policy proposals detailed in the Discussion Guide. And, later in the process, having discussed the series of five policy topics

and voted on the different options, participants were invited to reflect on the financial implications of their preferred options. This activity was managed through another series of votes offering participants the opportunity to rate 3 different potential ways of funding their preferred policies, 5 different areas of council spending in which cuts could potentially be made and, in the last of these polls, to rate areas of spending in which they would not like cuts to be made. This series of activities was labelled in the timetable as “making trade-offs and balancing the budget”.

Having been given the opportunity, individually and collectively, to register views and preferences related to 5 different areas of public policy each table was asked to ‘elect’ a ‘representative’ to sit on a body that was called the ‘Open Budget Panel’ whose job would be to maintain contact with Assembly members after this event. This Panel was also given the task of reporting back to Assembly members how the ‘decisions’ taken at this event were taken forward by Harrow Council and represented in the budget for 2006/7.

Pam Giddy told participants that although the results of the Assembly would not be in any way binding on the Council, the results would be ‘taken seriously’.

Participants were then each asked to fill in an evaluation form which invited their feedback on various aspects of the event: how much they had learned, the degree to which the event had changed their view of Harrow Council, and whether they thought an event of this kind should be repeated or be held for other areas of the Council’s work. Pam Giddy then invited the Labour leader of Harrow Council and the Conservative Group’s Chief Whip to the stage to deliver short speeches in which they each expressed their support for the day’s events.

Pam Giddy then introduced the final group activity of the day: a quiz. This activity had not appeared on the official timetable but was announced in a light-hearted way

and presented as a bit of fun to round off the day's events. The quiz, Pam Giddy said, would test participants' local knowledge. Giddy posed three different questions, one by one, with the questions and different possible answers being displayed once more on the big screens around the hall. Each of these questions asked participants to identify from the names displayed on the screens, once more using their keypads, the celebrity with a Harrow connection. Question one asked participants to name a "leading fashion designer who lived in Harrow before hitting the big time" (correct answer, Vivienne Westwood); question two asked participants which famous cookery writer is 'from Harrow' (Isabella Beeton); and question three asked participants to name the 'famous cricketer' who had studied at Harrow (correct answer, Mark Ramprakash). While just under 50% identified Vivienne Westwood, more than 55% identified Isabella Beeton and Mark Ramprakash respectively. After thanking the Assembly, Giddy announced that before leaving participants should collect their £25 participation fee from a team of people standing at a desk at the back of the hall.

The assembly event itself worked to articulate different forms of publicness and conceptions of politics with one another. The event was strongly cast as a facilitative, enabling event, privileging the idea of a self-directed public that could disrupt more formal and institutionally-bound forms of politics. However, the design and management of the event, the technologies used and the specific practices on which it relied – including the presentation of options and the process of voting – invoked and strung together different forms of publicness and politics. The facilitative practices used to articulate these different forms of publicness and politics had particular consequences, in that these forms served to interrupt each other, rendering each into a less distinct form. Though the outcomes of these processes of interruption were not completely predictable they were managed or contained in particular ways, both by 'facilitators' and by participants.

To understand how these processes of articulation and interruption worked, it is necessary to focus on the way in which the assembly activities were stitched together at this event. Two features are notable. The first concerns the staging of the event. Considering the way in which participants were invited to engage with the main topics on the agenda, it is possible to identify three distinct stages: the first involved the topic being introduced and framed; the second involved participants being given the opportunity to discuss the topic; and the third involved participants being invited to vote on the options with which had been presented.

One of the two forms of publicness and politics highlighted above was privileged above the other at each of these 3 stages. That is, a more council-led, top-down and instrumental form was privileged at stage one; a more self-organised, bottom-up conception of publicness at stage two; and a more council-led form of publicness at stage three, in which participants were invited to rate different pre-constituted policy and budget options. While one of the forms was privileged over the other at different points in this sequence, each of these forms nevertheless interrupts each other at each stage. But by stitching and stringing these stages together these different ideas of publicness and politics were woven together and brought into relation to each other.

While the Harrow Open Budget was cast by Harrow Council and the Power Inquiry as a facilitative event, it was these processes of articulation and interruption that characterised the facilitation overall. It was through these processes that different ideas of politics and publics were (temporarily) reconciled. This had particular consequences for the constitution of publics. By constructing this assembly as an initiative that would give a representative sample of Harrow's public a 'say' over its council's budget and public policy priorities, the public of this assembly was

constituted as an actor with the potential and capacity to lead the council; and the council was positioned as an actor with at least the capacity to follow these public representatives. But by pre-constituting, directing and restricting the agenda of the event, the Council was also positioned as an actor able to lead the public. In short, each of these actors was constituted as a subject with the need and capacity to both lead and follow.

These different subject positions were uneasily reconciled in the discourse of collaboration that was privileged at the event itself. In practice, this collaboration was 'facilitated' through practices that, over the course of this event, worked over and over again to tighten and loosen control over proceedings in a number of different ways. That is, to say, at all those moments when the agenda or participants' attention was directed in particular ways onto particular topics or towards particular voting options for example, control over this process was effectively tightened and the Council exercised leadership. However, at the points in which participants were given opportunities to discuss these agenda-points or generate new policy options or, to a lesser extent, at moments at which they were invited to decide between the different pre-constituted options, then control was effectively loosened and participants had some measure of control over proceedings.

It follows that, while the Power Inquiry and the Council have been shown to have initiated, led and constituted the formal agenda of this event, the way in which the assembly was designed nevertheless opened-up certain possibilities for more self-organised and indeterminate forms of public action. This is not to say that the outcome of the short bouts of public action were not limited, constrained or managed; indeed I have shown that they were. But I want to point out, first, that each of these two distinct understandings of publicness and politics was inscribed

into and thereby also produced by the design of this assembly; and secondly, that these forms were not just articulated with each other but also reliant on each other and therefore *mutually constitutive* in this setting. This was because without these processes of articulation and interruption, it would have been difficult to present this initiative as a 'facilitative' event; that is not only as an event that could generate a process of public involvement that could lead to certain 'public' outcomes, but also as an event that was not wholly determined in advance of public participation.

The next section goes on to highlight some of the ways in which participants performed different conceptions of publicness and negotiated different forms of politics in their interactions within the assembly, focussing in particular on one area of debate.

3.3. Participating in Harrow Open Budget

Having looked at some of the ways that Harrow Open Budget assembly was convened and assembled, this account now considers some of the ways in which those enrolled as participants acted during this event, performing and negotiating different conceptions of publicness and politics. The primary sources I shall draw on here include a document produced by the organisers of this event that records the different table discussions that each of the table facilitators recorded using their laptop computers during the exercise itself; and a second document that records the results of the various votes that took place over the course of this event. The aim here is to illustrate some of the ways in which participants followed the lead provided by the council during these bouts of participation and also, at times, used

opportunities to take the lead themselves by enunciating a range of critical comments and alternative policy proposals.

My analysis begins by exploring part of the 57-page document that records participants' comments contributed during the table discussions. Since, for reasons of space, it is not possible to reflect on the comments related to all 5 of these public policy discussions in any detail, the comments recorded as a result of just one of these bouts of participation will be explored here: namely, the discussion of Harrow's 'waste-management' policy. In the event's official Discussion Guide document, this discussion session was entitled 'Reducing the amount of waste we produce'. It invited participants to consider two options: option one being 'No forced measure, public education instead'. Regarding Option One, the Discussion Guide states:

"This is the status quo option. The council would continue to collect rubbish on a weekly basis and heavily promote optional recycling via the green box scheme and brown bins [...]"
(Harrow Open Budget Discussion Guide, p.3)

And option two – 'Collect waste less often, recyclables more regularly':

"In this option the new 'brown bins' would be collected weekly but the standard wheelie bins (for non-recyclable waste) would be collected once a fortnight [...]"
(Harrow Open Budget Discussion Guide, p.4)

The document that records some of the ways that participants responded to the invitation to discuss Harrow's waste policy is itself divided into three parts, with different categories of comments recorded in each. Two of these record comments that table-facilitators judged to relate to each of the two waste management policy options with which participants were presented. The third and fourth parts of this section record 'additional options' and 'additional comments' respectively.

Participants were given 30 minutes to discuss and deliberate waste management and what was immediately striking to me when I reviewed this section of the document was that few comments were recorded which related directly to the two pre-constituted policy options. More were concerned with 'additional options' and 'additional comments'. While there were around 40 comments in the document that related directly to the two pre-constituted policy options, there were nearly 100 separate contributions in the part of the document that listed 'additional options' contributed by participants and over 40 in the 'additional comments' section. The distribution of the comments across these different parts of this document and the proportion of the contributions in each, provides an initial indication that, while participants did engage with and discuss the two pre-constituted options, they also used this opportunity to think critically and imaginatively about waste-management issues more broadly, ranging beyond the way this issue was framed for them in the Discussion Guide.

Participants' comments regarding the pre-constituted policy options presented to them at the event reflected support or concern about the different sorts of impacts these different policy proposals could have on Harrow and its residents. However, other participants criticised the ways these options were presented in the discussion guide. Several participants', for example, are critical of the way these options were presented as being mutually exclusive, in such a way that it was necessary to choose one over the other rather than both or neither of the options. A number of these participants suggest that both (or a combination) of the policy 'options' might be necessary if this issue were to be successfully addressed in the short and longer terms.

[Table 33] COMMENT: "[Option] 1&2 need to be thought of together [...]"

[Table 24] COMMENT: “The 2 options seem like a foregone conclusion. Should be presented differently: 1) Can’t enforce education no matter how much we like it. 2) Dislike smell of the recycle bins if not collected often enough – brown bins should be collected weekly.”

(Comment from participants on tables 24 and 33 taken from transcript of the waste management policy discussion conducted as part of the Harrow Open Budget event, 23 October 2005, p. 11-13).

To reiterate, the first of the two options was a proposal for additional public education and the second option was a proposal to collect waste less often and recyclables more often. Amongst the comments recorded in response to the second of these options, several expressed concern that this measure might be unfair since it would target the behaviour of consumers rather than the actions of producers of waste materials. These participants were recorded as expressing concern about the amount of unnecessary plastic packaging used by local food retailers and voicing a desire that their council should do something to discourage this rather than penalising end-users. Another participant is recorded as suggesting that Council Officers and Councillors needed to be made aware of and learn from ‘best practice’ in those countries that had already developed approaches to dealing with these kinds of issues.

[Table 31] COMMENT: “Reduce packaging – e.g. Germany has done this – Harrow should push government for this”

[Table 31] COMMENT: “Council should review procurement to minimise landfill – i.e. lead the way”

[Table 19] COMMENT: “[Reduce] amount of pre-packaged food in schools AND HERE! [at the Harrow Open Budget event at which pre-packaged food was provided to participants]”

(Comment from participants on tables 19 and 31 taken from transcript of the waste management policy discussion conducted as part of the Harrow Open Budget event, 23 October 2005, p. 11-13).

One of the proposals made repeatedly by different participants in the ‘additional options’ section of the document was that either a tax should be levied on waste producers such as supermarkets to discourage them from using unnecessary packaging, or that supermarkets should in some other way be made to take more responsibility for the waste they generate at a domestic level. Similar suggestions and proposals were also recorded regarding local takeaway food outlets. Some of those who supported the idea that producers needed to be made to take more responsibility for their own waste management also added that if a policy were to be developed that could encourage producers to pay, this would need to be implemented nationally and not just locally for it to be successful.

Several participants questioned the use of plastic cups and pre-packaged food at the Assembly event itself and commented that the council needed to address its own waste-management and procurement practices before instructing residents how to modify their behaviour. Others suggested that residents should be able to choose for themselves how they wanted to manage their waste and then be charged or rewarded accordingly. Participants also raised the issue of how the Council planned to recycle the extra domestic waste it was here proposing – via these policy options – to collect, questioning whether the extra emissions released by the incineration of this waste might itself raise public health issues and suggesting that composting should be considered instead. Another participant

questioned the targets for recycling and waste reduction that were set out in the Discussion Guide, commenting that they were not sufficiently ambitious.

In the part of this document that listed 'additional comments', participants were once again recorded as objecting to what they described as the limited range of options and ideas that were being offered by the Council. One of these comments raised the question of the council's expertise and ability to deliver the kinds of changes needed to improve waste management in Harrow. As well offering these and other criticisms, participants also used this discussion session to generate a range of rather more imaginative proposals, for example:

[Table 25] ADDITIONAL COMMENT: "More education on how to cook, will reduce rubbish"

(Comment from participants on table 25 taken from transcript of the waste management policy discussion conducted as part of the Harrow Open Budget event, 23 October 2005, p. 5-6).

While not exhaustive, this brief review of the proposals, ideas and comments recorded by those charged with facilitating table-discussions on Harrow's waste-management policy gives an insight into the diversity of views expressed and generated during the 30 minutes of discussion. These comments demonstrate that participants were involved and engaged in a variety of ways during this period of discussion. While a large number of comments indicate that participants did consider the merits of the pre-constituted options and contributed by elaborating on these outline proposals, an even larger number of comments showed participants ranging beyond, and indeed challenging and thereby seeking to move beyond, these options.

While there was some repetition and overlap between the option-specific and the broader comments that were recorded in this document, no consistent opinions and

therefore no indication of a consensus is observable about either of the pre-constituted options. While the comments exhibited no obvious collective appetite for these options, neither did they show a collective appetite for any one of the additional proposals that were generated as a result of these discussions. The fact that it was not possible to arouse any collective enthusiasm for any single additional policy idea contributed during the deliberative process is not surprising, since none of these ideas was deliberated or voted upon collectively at the time by the Assembly as a whole. This was because these ideas emerged from discussions conducted at table-level and were not at any point in this process actually fed-back to the whole assembly for further consideration. What initially appeared to be openings during this event were later closed down by the way in which activities were designed and sequenced.

The evidence from this document shows that there was neither a consensus nor a great deal of support for either of the pre-constituted public policy options related to waste-management in Harrow. Nevertheless the activity's participants were invited to undertake following this discussion was a 'vote' on the two options. For this, participants were invited to rate the options using their wireless keypads. Option 1 (collect waste less, recyclables more) received an average rating of 4.1 (out of a maximum of 9); and Option 2 (no forced measures, public education) received an average rating of 7.2.

Given that the comments recorded during the discussion demonstrated no great level of support for either of these options this result could possibly have been prompted by the fact that option 1 was linked to a £12 increase in Council Tax while option 2 was linked to a £3 reduction. Whatever the reason for this outcome, the result of this vote made an impact. First, because it could be presented as a result produced following a period of informed discussion. And, secondly, because this

outcome was presented in numerical form it seemed clearer, more objective and therefore also more authoritative (Miller, 1994).

At one level the process of inviting this public to vote, and the aggregation of these votes into these results worked to construct this event as an exercise in public participation and political accountability. However, given the results of the discussion activity that preceded the vote, the legitimacy of this voting process and its result must be cast into doubt. The 'Discussion Guide' document specifically invited participants to think, during each of the public policy discussions, whether there might be 'any options missing?' and, if there were, 'what would they look like?'. However the proliferation of additional ideas, proposals and critical comments generated by participants during these discussions were not taken into account at any stage after the table discussions had concluded. There simply was no procedure through which participants' contributions during these discussions could be taken into account in the wider assembly. Indeed, the apparent efficiency of the event seemed to depend on this. The use of polling technology could therefore be seen as another of the means through which those managing this event were able to reduce the complexity of this public participation exercise. Because only the pre-constituted options were available to participants during the voting stage, these polls generated outcomes that were at least more quantifiable than the outcomes of the political discussions.

The ways in which participants engaged with and interacted in the setting of this 'discussion' activity are interesting in their own right. However, it is useful to reflect upon how these results might relate to the two understandings of publicness and participative politics already shown to have been inscribed into this initiative's publicity material and its technologies of assembly.

The first and most prominently promoted version of participative politics presented this initiative as participant-centred, accessible, open-ended and potentially transformative. The second version, meanwhile, presented a view of participative politics as a more directed, less open and more instrumental activity. Exploring the document that recorded comments made during one of the discussions played-out during this event, it is possible to highlight ways in which these comments relate to each of these understandings and perspectives.

A proportion of these comments, as has been shown above, indicate that during this discussion some participants directly addressed and reflected on the question of which of the two options might be the most desirable and appropriate. As has also been shown, a larger proportion of these comments did not relate to these options in such a straightforward way. Instead they problematised the options in a range of ways, whether by problematising how these options had been presented to them or by commenting on what these options excluded. Crucially, these options were also problematised by the ways in which many participants used this discussion activity to generate an array of 'new' options. By generating these new options participants can be observed attempting to steer this political process, albeit temporally, in a range of directions that were different to those privileged by those managing this process.

This evidence shows that participants drew on resources and ideas beyond those presented to them in the Council's 'Discussion Guide'. However, this evidence also shows participants performing and negotiating the two different ideas of publicness shown to be running through this initiative's publicity and public-assembly design. By commenting on and expressing preferences for the options during this discussion, they enacted a directed and instrumental version of publicness and politics. However, by elaborating, deconstructing, problematising and transforming

these options through the generation of new alternative policy proposals, they also enacted a less directed and more self-organised form of publicness and politics. It is possible to see that these less directed forms of public action were nevertheless articulated with a more instrumental, problem-oriented understanding.

3.4 Harrow Open Budget and the constitution of publics and politics

In this final section I want to return to the multiple forms of publicness and of politics summoned up by this public participation exercise, and to reflect on some of the ways in which these forms of publicness were articulated with one another.

The publicity materials analysed in section 3.1 suggest two different constructions of publics and politics. The first was an image of a self-organising, indeterminate public, contributing to a bottom up, informal and anti-elitist form of politics. The second, in contrast, invoked a much more Council-led, top-down and instrumental conception of politics, one that required publics to be summoned, organised and managed by governing bodies and their agents.

As I showed in section 3.1, these were articulated together in quite subtle ways, with the 'homepage' of the website privileging the former and the latter becoming more evident in subsequent pages. The discourse of 'openness' was dominant throughout; but it was only through a close reading of the text that it became evident that the event was to have neither an open membership (people were selected on the basis of pre-constituted categories of the public) nor an open agenda (the

discussion was to centre on policy options pre-formulated by council officials). Nor, indeed, was the deliberative process to be open since it was to be shaped and steered by professional facilitators and facilitation materials.

Nevertheless, this initiative exhibited two forms of publicness and two different notions of participative politics. In this way those initiating the exercise constituted an ambiguous terrain of public engagement; ambiguous in that, according to the website at least, it promised somehow to cultivate, articulate and possibly reconcile practices of publicness and participative politics organised and led by publics themselves; with, practices of publicness and politics organised and led by Councillors and Council officers. The website cultivated practices that were at one and the same time open (and therefore necessarily indeterminate) and focused on delivering certain pre-constituted outcomes (and therefore more instrumental).

The website also deployed two public registers: the register of a dissatisfied, impatient public and the register of a Council committed to a particular form of public engagement. The dissatisfied public voice summoned up on the website's homepage was one that called for greater levels of Council accountability and public control; the voice of the council answered this call – one click into this site – with a specific proposal for a managed form of public participation. There was therefore a performance of public accountability already enacted on this website, a performance that entailed a kind of cross-dressing on the part of the Council, demonstrating that it could identify with and indeed could itself empathise and speak as its public as well as speak for itself.

As shown in section 3.2, these distinct ideas re-appeared in the design of the participative assembly used to orchestrate the main Harrow Open Budget event. The assembly enacted these apparently distinct ideas of publicness and politics in a

range of ways. Clearly, the design was one that enabled the Council to frame expressions of publicness and set boundaries to the political process prior to the arrival of participants. For example, the main assembly event took place at a time, in a place and for a duration set by its organisers; organisers took charge of decisions regarding what would constitute a representative profile of attendees and the decision about the numbers of participants; and, crucially, took charge of the agenda, design, staging and scheduling of the sequence of participative activities and even decisions about what kinds of outcomes the event would be geared towards generating.

However, this design summoned up, and thereby also offered a status to, alternative notions of publicness and politics: that of the self-organising, autonomous public engaged in a 'bottom up' form of politics. The design privileged, for example, the visibility and audibility of participants over Councillors or Council officials; offered participants a total of 2 hours 30 minutes of time to feed in 'directly' to the policy and budgetary decision-making process via the series of different table-discussions and polls; and, in as much as it invited participants to elect its own panel of public representatives, to report back to members of the assembly how the Council used the results of this event.

What is particularly notable about this event is that each of these apparently distinct ideas of publicness and politics circulated throughout the event with each privileged over the other at different points. Even more significant however were the ways in which these forms were articulated with each other and thereby stitched and strung together. These processes were evident, for example, during the discussion activities during which participants were invited to discuss and express their views as they related to the different sets of pre-constituted policy options. Framed in this way, participants were being invited both to lead the Council and at the same time

follow its lead. However, if the effect of articulating these ideas rather than seeing them separately is taken into account, then what was constituted was an activity in which participants were invited to reflect on, discuss, elaborate and develop the pre-constituted policy ideas with which they had been presented. Understood in this way, each of the two distinct ideas of publicness and participative politics has the effect of interrupting the other, generating a hybrid form.

This hybrid form is highly ambivalent, however, holding these two distinct modes of publicness and participative politics in tension. By articulating and stitching together these notions of publicness and participative politics in this way, the organisers of the event, whether intentionally or not, summoned-up and lent legitimacy to this rather ambivalent construction. Importantly, however, the analysis of one of these discussion activities showed participants taking up the subject position offered to them by this hybrid form of publicness and participative politics. The records of the table discussions showed participants both taking the lead, and taking up the opportunities provided to them of translating, re-articulating and re-directing this public project in numerous ways. Crucially, these interventions were both contained and temporary and took place within the enclaves of bounded table-discussions.

This process may be understood as an event through which the council worked to speak through, rather than to, its public. However, if these table-level interventions are taken seriously, it could also be understood as a process through which this public at least attempted to speak through its Council. It did so by utilising the resources it was offered during this event and by drawing on its own resources from 'outside' – be they experiences, beliefs, knowledges or forms of rhetorical expertise.

There is therefore evidence (outlined in section 3.2) that the discussion activities afforded a range of different contributions, and evidence that shows voting activities

were organised in a way that constrained participants' choices and voices. This was because this poll simply required participants to respond to, rather than input into, the different pre-constituted options by rating them using their personal wireless keypads. However this technology did enable a set of public results to be produced that appeared less diffuse and cacophonous than those produced by the discussion activity. This was a public result that was numerical and thereby appeared in a form in which a majority view for one or other of the options could be presented. The dramatisation of voting activities through the use of lighting effects, loud music and the creation of tension, by limiting the poll to a 10 second time slot were all significant here. This is because these additional elements worked to supplement what would otherwise have been (and quite possibly still was) a rather mechanical, conventional, less autonomous and novel activity.

From a research perspective, one of the aspects of this initiative that is particularly notable is the way in which the different technologies of public assembly used during this event constructed different and often contradictory sets of public results or effects. The most obvious examples are, first, the discussion activity at tables, where it was demonstrated that most contributors were not satisfied with the council's pre-constituted 'options'; and, secondly, the voting activity through which the aggregated results showed a clear majority preference for one of the options over the other. In the setting of this event the result of the public vote was privileged over the results of the public discussions. However, using the electronic record of these discussions I have been able to critique the basis and therefore also the legitimacy of this vote. There are therefore, in this case, competing ideas of public accountability being enabled by these different technologies of public assembly.

On the basis of this analysis it would be easy to write this event off as a form of public manipulation; or as a form of governmentality that seeks the consent of the

governed through forms of self-management (see, for example, the references to Dean (2002) in Chapter 1). It is important to remember that of the two cultures of publicness and participative politics that were conjured up in this setting, it is only that one 'led' by the Councillors of Harrow that had the formal democratic mandate. However, as has been shown here, this project was positioned as a way of dealing with what had been constructed as a particular historical moment in which publics required more control over local politics, and a moment in which this Council required the legitimacy provided to them by an event of this kind.

The space of this Harrow Open Budget event could therefore be understood, as Doreen Massey (2005) suggests, as a place produced through these social relations and the different ideas of how publicness should be assembled through these relations. In Rosalyn Deutsche's words, this space is "the product of conflict" (1996:278). This is not to argue that that this public participation exercise summoned-up a form of publicness and participative politics that is somehow inherently dysfunctional; quite the opposite. The evidence of different ways of enacting publicness and the evidence of some antagonism and negotiation between these different perspectives (albeit negotiation that is skewed and constrained in a variety of ways) is evidence that this assembly was in certain respects "*genuinely* public" (Massey 2005:153, original italics). According to an argument developed by Massey, in which she draws on Mouffe (1993) and others, space is only *genuinely* public when it is itself the product of public negotiations: negotiations that Massey asserts will, "always be contoured through the playing out of unequal social relations" (2005:153).

I think the way that Massey attends here to the webs of social relations in which expressions of publicness arise is very useful. However, rather less useful I think is the way Massey invokes the notion of a 'genuine' public as this seems to allude to

the idea that it may be possible to perform publicness *authentically* in some way.

I have already begun to show here how multiple ideas of the public circulate in settings of practice such as that of the Harrow Open Budget and I will problematise this idea of authentic publicness further in the other two case studies and in chapter 7.

Building on what I think is most useful about Massey's thinking, it is productive to begin conceptualise the place of this assembly as a place in which different ideas of publicness were not only assembled but also re-assembled and negotiated and contested. It is not therefore necessary to understand this space as a Council space or as a residents' space or even as a space of collaboration. Instead it is possible to understand this space as a space in which the meaning of publicness was, at least temporarily, under active negotiation. It is useful to return to the typology of public participation that was generated in chapter 2 to expand this point and to begin to relate this analysis to some of the assumptions that are being explored in this research overall.

Preliminary research into this case indicated that Harrow Open Budget would be organised as a local government exercise that would privilege a deliberative approach to public participation. For these reasons this initiative was located in a particular place in the typology generated in chapter 2 (see table 5 below).

		O R I E N T A T I O N		
		Deliberation	Pleasure	Transformation
D O M A I N	Governmental	Harrow Open Budget		
	Popular media			
	Social movement			

Table 5: Harrow Open Budget in the typology of public participation

Having had the opportunity to explore this initiative in more detail what has become evident is that the separations and boundaries between different domains and orientations are rather less clear and more permeable than they initially appeared, at least as far as the case of Harrow Open Budget is concerned.

To be more specific, there is unmistakable evidence that the discussion sessions, set up as part of this assembly, did offer participants opportunities to enact forms of deliberative conduct. Indeed a kind of code of conduct for public deliberation was even spelled out on the opening page of the Discussion Guide document. This stated that the role of participants during these discussions was to:

- listen to everyone and respect their opinion. Ask if they don't understand.
- act themselves, but in your responses consider what you might do if you had been nominated to make important decisions on behalf of the wider community.
- talk honestly about the things that are important, that need to be said, for the good and the future of Harrow people.

(Harrow Open Budget Discussion Guide, p.2)

What has been brought to the fore in this chapter are some of the ways that this exercise was also set up and designed to offer a sociable, light-hearted, informal, exciting, dramatic and pleasurable experience for its participants. The icon of the small girl punning through a loud-hailer on this initiative's website; the way the participants are arranged in an array of relatively small, intimate and rather informal public groups around banqueting tables; the use of lighting effects and bursts of loud pop music to change the tempo and atmosphere to create a sense of anticipation and drama around the disclosure of voting results; and the use of keypads to conduct a 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire' style trivia quiz to involve participants in 'a bit of fun' to conclude the event, all point to efforts to generate practices that would, at least, feel less formal, more enjoyable and pleasurable than more conventional forms of local government politics.

An emphasis on enabling forms of public self-organisation and public leadership as a means of rebalancing, inverting and even *transforming* relations of power between this local public and its council also became evident as a result of this analysis. The homepage of the Harrow Open Budget suggested that this initiative would enact some kind of departure from business-as-usual; the design of the event allowed its 220 public participants to dominate the space in which they were assembled – at least in terms of the sheer impact of their visual and auditory presence in this space (and by rendering 'the council' relatively invisible and inaudible); and discussion activities offered participants time and resources which they used to generate a multiplicity of policy ideas, critiques and proposals. These and other features of this exercise on occasions lent this event the feel that some kind of 'bottom-up' social movement event was taking place.

The Harrow Open Budget drew, therefore, on different repertoires of public performance, combined different techniques of assembly and integrated a range of forms of public address. I have already indicated that one of the organisers of this event – Power Inquiry’s Director, Pam Giddy – apparently drew on her experience in television and approached the staging of this event, at least partly, as a piece of ‘TV production’. Giddy’s involvement may therefore help to begin to account for some of the different forms of practice that were deployed and stitched together during this exercise. However, this should not detract from the ambivalence of these practices or from the way these practices unsettle the distinctions and separations that were put in place in the typology.

These practices were ambivalent, not least because, as I have shown, they afforded forms of public negotiation that produced ambivalent results. Some results, such as the results of the votes which limited participants to choosing between pre-constituted policy options, had the effect of reproducing conventional relations of power between this local public and its local, democratically elected representatives; other results, such as the results of the discussion sessions, temporarily brought into being a more dynamic relationship, a relationship that offered this public the chance to represent itself. Switching between these different orientations towards public participation practice, Harrow Open Budget, as a form of performance, therefore permeated boundaries between the categories in the typology. Viewed in this way, its position in this typology starts to look less fixed and more complicated. This is perhaps because the event drew on, transposed, stitched and strung together forms of practice that associated it with the domains of popular media and social movement as well as governmental practice, and sometimes rendered itself as a transformation oriented exercise, other times as a deliberative. And even at other moments as a pleasurable or enjoyable form of practice.

Despite this complexity, imbalances between the ways in which resources were distributed between organisers and participants in this space meant organisers were able to exercise power over participants by actively constraining certain activities and thereby shaping certain outcomes. It was not only that choices were constrained; by taking charge of the design of this event organisers were also able to regulate which performative repertoire was privileged at different points. However, to take control in these ways this Council was required to disavow, temporarily, its existing public authority and established set of performative conventions in an attempt to speak and perform in a 'new' and more popular and accountable way. Rather than act as a democratically elected public authority, it acted through a representative sample of 'the public' itself. To do this Harrow Council, or at least those commissioned to act on its behalf, performed as facilitators, democratic technicians and convivial hosts. And those participants who were constituted as 'the public' were required – in order to be heard – to perform as a certain kind of public expert, as deliberative legislators and budget-makers as well as more informally as 'themselves'.

Chapter 4

Vote for Me

VOTE FOR ME: HAVE YOU GOT WHAT IT TAKES TO BE AN MP?

(Headline of Vote for Me press release, 14 April 2004, p.1)

Vote for Me was selected as a case study since it reflects an orientation towards the idea of public participation that emphasises *pleasure*, fun and entertainment; and is an example selected from the domain of the mass *media* (see table 3 in chapter 2). Vote for Me was promoted as a television event that would enable the UK public to elect a new kind of politician drawn from the ranks of ordinary people. Viewers switching on to Vote for Me saw contestants put through a series of ‘challenges’ and then subjected to a public vote to find a ‘winner’. Using this show as a launch pad for a possible career as an MP in the House of Commons, the winner of this reality television contest was then free to stand as a prospective parliamentary candidate in the General Election that was to follow only a few weeks later.

Power Idol? Now politicians audition for votes

Figure 7: Observer newspaper headline, Sunday 4 January 2004, p.1.

The first sign that a venture of this kind was being considered as a significant political initiative in the UK was an article which appeared on the front-page of the Sunday newspaper The Observer in January 2004 (see headline as figure 7, above). In this article, the Observer’s then Chief Political Correspondent announced the news that Peter Bazalgette, chairman of production company Endemol and

developer of reality television show Big Brother, was in talks with broadcasters about a political version of the reality television show Pop Idol. “Broadcasters have not yet had the chutzpah to commission a formatted popularity contest for politics, but we’re now discussing it with them”, (Observer, 4 January 2004, p.1) Bazalgette announced.

In a separate article commenting on news of this development in the same edition of The Observer, Stephan Shakepeare, director of opinion research at YouGov, related the news of Bazalgette’s latest initiative to a wider set of contemporary developments including recent experiments with online deliberative polling, the launch of the UK Labour Party’s Big Conversation initiative in 2003, and the news of a 2004 poll that positioned Switzerland – “which operates under direct democracy” – as “the happiest country on Earth” (Observer, 4 January 2004, p.28). Forms of public participation such as these have the potential, Shakespeare claimed in his opinion piece, to unleash “consumer power” on the “entrenched monopoly of the party political system” (ibid: p.28). “Consumer power is the new revolutionary force”, contends Shakespeare. “Representative democracy, with its reliance on essentially tribal political parties, will soon face competition”, he predicted (ibid: p.28).

Distinctions between entertainment and politics seemed to have been temporarily collapsed in these two Observer articles. Bazalgette and Shakespeare implied that a problem for those working in each of these domains needed to be addressed: namely, the problem of how to engage the attention of large numbers of people. Both entertainment and politics compete, they suggest, to engage people in what is constituted as a single field. With entertainment initiatives such as Pop Idol cast as popular and empowering in each of these accounts, the techniques used by such programmes are conceived of here as techniques that could also be used to re-popularise the UK electoral system and empower those currently disenfranchised by

the model of politics. The project of making politics more engaging and more popular is therefore bound up in these accounts with claims about the intrinsic value of the reality television formats used by programmes such as Pop Idol and Big Brother.

The techniques used by popular reality-television game shows such as Pop Idol and Big Brother, as well as the kinds of claims made for them above by commentators such as Bazalgette and Shakespeare, have been the subject of sustained attention by a group of media and political scholars in recent years. Some of these claims have already been highlighted in Chapter 2 and others will be mentioned as this chapter unfolds. A group of scholars including van Zoonen (2005) and Coleman (2003, 2005) are hopeful about the potential of techniques and formats used by reality television programmes and optimistic about how they might be used to encourage individuals and groups to engage with and participate in politics. They are enthusiastic about the possibility of translating reality television techniques and formats from the domain of entertainment practice to the domain of parliamentary and party-political practice because, they assert, that the use of such techniques and formats could potentially address certain problems that they consider to be endemic in these established forms of political practice. Another group, including Riegert (2007), Couldry (2003, 2008), Tinknell and Raghuram (2003), Biressi and Nunn (2005) and Mehl (2005) have, however, been rather more cautious about such initiatives and those claims regarding empowerment and democracy that animate them. These scholars are more sceptical since they suggest that reality television is not simply the product of developments in television entertainment but is also interconnected to wider ranging set of economic and social developments.

Significantly, Vote for Me sets itself up as working both with and across distinctions between entertainment and politics and, by implication, across different ideas and

ways of practising publicness that are typically associated with each. Exploring Vote for Me is therefore an opportunity to study the constitution and effects of a venture that works to make politics more entertaining and entertainment more political. Vote for Me is also a case study that can test some of the recently-developed theories touched on above which are concerned with the political and public potential of reality television formats.

The idea, invoked by Vote for Me, of using forms of entertainment practice to engage people in politics, has gained momentum in recent years not just amongst scholars but also amongst public policy actors. Bazalgette (the person who popularised Big Brother who was cited in the Observer article highlighted above) had been appointed in 2003 to the Conservative Party's Commission for Democracy, to explore such ideas. OFCOM's 2004, Review of Public Service Broadcasting also, for example, contended that reality television as a form of entertainment has a place in public broadcasting. Even Gordon Brown has outlined his vision for an 'X factor Britain':

"This is why I like programmes like X Factor, Dragon's Den and the Apprentice. They show the value of aspiration, how anyone can achieve things"

('Gordon Brown outlines his vision for an X Factor Britain', The Observer, November 5, 2006, accessed online)

It is important, however, to situate the rise of reality television programming in a wider context. The decline in audiences for mainstream political news programmes as well as structural changes to the political economy of television have led to the privileging of low-cost and non-scripted forms of 'reality' type light entertainment programming (Riegert, 2007: 3-8). Equally significant is the rise of what one author has called the 'plebiscitary industries' (Hartley, 2007: 21-59) which seek to measure

and in many cases monetise public opinion using technologies as diverse as phone-ins, focus groups, readers polls and user tracking.

Vote for Me could be seen as being located within broader global trends and media economies by recognising that this initiative is itself a re-working of earlier attempts to generate a venture of this type. I have been able to identify three similar initiatives: The People's Candidate!, broadcast in Argentina in 2002 following the breakdown in political credibility of the Argentinean government as a result of its default on an IMF loan.

In 2004 a series called American Candidate ran in the US and another series also named Vote for Me, ran in Australia each with a similar format. ITV's Vote for Me in the UK was not a direct copy of any one of these programmes since, for example, the US makers of The People's Candidate started a new political party called The Party of the People which TV contestants competed to lead; while the backers of Vote for Me in Australia put up \$75,000 prize money to help the winner campaign for election. With UK legislation outlawing political bias on the part of broadcasters, the makers of ITV's Vote for Me left it up to contestants to decide whether they wanted to stand for election after competing on the programme and offered no such financial-backing for any subsequent campaigning activities.

The UK version of Vote for Me was, finally, produced without the involvement of Peter Bazalgette or Endemol and was therefore not directly connected with Big Brother in any way. It was instead commissioned by the News and Current Affairs Department of ITV and produced by the company – Mentorn – responsible for, amongst other programmes, the BBC's Question Time. Having introduced this case by locating it amongst a range of contemporaneous developments, the rest of this chapter will focus on Vote for Me itself.

Section 4.1 will engage with Vote for Me's publicity material to identify and discuss the publics, forms of publicness and types of participatory politics privileged in this material. Having examined how this initiative was set up discursively, this chapter will move on, in section 4.2, to study how these ideas were translated into a design for a form of public assembly. Section 4.3 will explore how participants negotiated this initiative and the various ideas, norms and forms of practice that were privileged as part of it. The conclusion takes a step back from the detail of the enactment of Vote for Me to consider the contradictory publics and politics at stake in these practices.

Bazalgette and Shakespeare's interventions, described earlier, raise the important question of the value of these techniques. These interventions also raise the analytic problem of how Vote for Me should be located and understood as an initiative. In short, should it be understood as an entertainment venture or as a political initiative? Or should it instead be regarded as a more complex and ambivalent combination of these forms?

One way of understanding Vote for Me would be to regard it as a facilitative venture that simply worked to provide viewers with a way of staging publicness. Political theorist Stephen Coleman (2003, 2005, 2006), cited in the Vote for Me press release that will be discussed below, has been at the vanguard of recent attempts to formulate a set of positive, normative proposals for the use of reality-television to re-make the political and public domains.

For Coleman the "immense popularity of reality TV formats of many kinds is linked to the public's desire to witness itself as a central actor in its own drama" (2006:28). "Citizens are no longer content with being passive spectators", he contends

(2005:13). For these and other reasons, Coleman asserts, it would be a mistake “to dismiss or disdain formats, methods and strategies that have a potential to generate a connection between political democracy and popular culture” (2006:29). Coleman presents an account in which the border between what he describes as “serious, rational, high politics” and “frivolous, distracting, low culture” is “less significant than it once seemed to be” (2006:8). Politicians and the contestants appearing on programmes such as Big Brother each “rely on similar claims to be authentic”. And, Coleman contends, the representative claims each makes in its bid for votes entails “performative appeals which are remarkably similar” (2006:8). Using this reasoning Coleman, argues that:

“Rather than the top-down model of accountability, with its exclusive emphasis upon the images, activities and foibles of political representatives, there is scope for a two-way model which, as well as holding politicians to account, enables the public to provide their own accounts of how they want to be represented” (2006:29)

This is a position that resonates with that of Dominique Mehl (2005), who affords reality television a “pivotal role in the search for norms” (2005:93). Mehl gives reality television this role because she characterises the contemporary moment as a time of de-traditionalisation and individualisation in which the authority of ‘experts’ (such as career politicians) is in decline. That which is public or private, speakable or unspeakable, or inside or outside politics is no longer, according to Mehl, governed predominantly by party politicians or governmental institutions. Instead, such issues are subjectively elaborated and constructed through publicly-staged discussions. According to her account, individuals are ‘the entrepreneurs’ of their own lives, entrusted with finding their own way (2005:93). She, like Coleman, is therefore rather hopeful about the potential of reality television and the political possibilities this medium opens up.

Mehl's account casts the makers of reality television programmes as the facilitators of forms of 'reflexive modernisation'. Such programmes offer individuals, she suggests, the resources they require to perform on new public stages and as such are therefore potentially empowering. Because of the way in which Mehl's account foregrounds a theory of social change based on ideas of individualisation and de-traditionalisation, such public stages offered by reality television programmes are viewed benignly. Rather than offering the potential for individual incorporation and subjugation, these public stages offer individuals access to social landmarks and help them to locate and navigate fast-changing norms and proactively to forge their identities.

Nick Couldry, another scholar of contemporary media practices, offers an alternative perspective. He sees 'reality television' as itself a contradiction in terms because rather than potentially offering access to 'authentic' 'reality', as it does in Coleman's account, reality television is instead for Couldry a mediated construction (2003:104). Television media, including reality television programmes, constitute their authority, he claims, through the ways it offers viewers privileged connections to events of broader social significance (2003:98-99). Live transmission in particular, Couldry contends, offers the guarantee of a "connection to our shared social realities as they are happening" (2003:96). Such 'realities' are constructed realities two key senses: firstly, because they are fabricated using a variety of identifiable techniques; for example, through the use of handheld camera to make images appear deliberately juddery, or via close-up shots to 'reveal' people's emotions; or through the use of helicopter shots that appear to offer an objective overview of a particular situation (2003:105). Secondly, such realities are constructed in the sense that the narratives that media generate are typically highly partial versions of 'the real world' in as much

as they constitute and privilege certain ideas of social reality over others (Couldry 2003: 142-144).

Like Mehl, Couldry claims that the development of forms of reality television is related to certain sets of broader changes in society. But while Mehl explicitly relates these developments to a version of the 'reflexive modernity' thesis, Couldry foregrounds what he asserts is a contemporary turn towards 'neo-liberalism'.

In line with this new regime of rule, Couldry argues that individuals are only able to be successful, in settings of reality television, if they regulate their behaviour in certain ways. For this reason, Couldry reduces the version of public participation and governance offered in these settings, to no more than an offer of a framework for a particular form of 'neo-liberal' regulation and training. The "fundamental question about media", for Couldry, is "the question about power" and what he identifies to be "the uneven distribution of the power to influence representations of 'social reality'" (2003:19). Couldry urges his readers to think beyond the democratising claims made by many of those involved in the production of reality television programmes and instead to focus on the material constraints that lie behind the appearances of 'ordinary people' in this genre of media (2003:108).

In his 2008 article *Reality TV, or the Secret Theatre of Neoliberalism*, Couldry asserts that the producers of reality television take on a rather less benign intermediary role than that invoked in the accounts of Coleman and Mehl. For Couldry, reality television programmes work to translate the "truths" of neoliberalism into playful forms that render the values enacted through this system acceptable (2008:3). Rather than the neutral sounding 'public stages' evoked by Mehl, Couldry argues that reality television programmes are settings in which participants are tutored and required to perform in certain ways. In elaborating this argument,

Couldry lists a series of ways in which reality television tracks “with striking fidelity the dynamics of the neoliberal workplace” (2008:11). Among these are the ways in which “absolute external authority” is imagined, whether this is the authority of the audience or the authority of programme makers and the ways in which “people are judged as individuals” teaching participants that the consequences of their actions must be “borne individually”. “Deep acting” and the appearance of being positive, passionate and authentic are also required in these settings (2008:10-11).

Couldry, Mehl and Coleman’s perspectives on reality television are each insightful. The issues of how politics and entertainment intersect, how reality television may facilitate public engagement, access and interaction and how this genre intersects with wider ranging contemporary socio-economic developments will all inform the analysis below. Having begun to locate Vote for Me in a broader context the sections that follow will now develop a more fine grained analysis of this initiative.

4.1 Publicising Vote for Me

This section will highlight how certain publics, conceptions of publicness and participatory politics were all invoked and privileged over others in the materials used to publicise this initiative. While the Vote for Me press release was not the only piece of material used to publicise this event, it was selected for detailed analysis because of the way it worked to crystallise the show’s proposition and to legitimise the Vote for Me proposal for a ‘new’ type of political practice.

I want to begin by outlining two key moves made in this press release: first, a move through which ITV put in place certain eligibility criteria for prospective contestants wishing to take part in this contest; and secondly, a move that worked to fashion a

particular account of recent UK political and social history and thereby legitimise this approach in a particular way. Each of these moves will be shown here to have generated a variety of effects that are significant for this analysis.

The opening section of the Vote for Me press release states:

“Today ITV officially launches its search for the person who, according to TV viewers, has the right credentials to be a candidate for a seat in the House of Commons [...] Volunteer entrants will only be eligible if they have no affiliation with any political party that qualifies for election broadcasts” (Vote for Me press release, 14 April 2004, p.1)

ITV, cast in this account as a political intermediary; and television viewers, cast here as sovereign political actors; are repeatedly differentiated from and elevated above political parties and career politicians in this press release. Two eligibility criteria are invoked for those wishing to apply to take part in this contest. The first is that potential contestants would need to be free of any formal allegiance to any of the major political parties. The second is that in order stand for a seat in the House of Commons applicants will need to be citizens of the UK. These eligibility criteria privilege ideas of a national public, a public that is constituted as being ‘authentic’ and ‘untainted’ because it is free from formal affiliation with any one of the major political parties. But this public is also constituted as a public of voters in at least two senses. Voting is associated not only with Parliamentary elections but also nowadays with reality television. In this press release the British public is therefore bound together, not only by its capacity to act in mainstream political elections but also by its ability to receive, watch and participate in reality television events that involve a ‘public’ vote. Of all these claims, the claim that this public is unaffiliated with any of the main political parties is probably the most striking, and is stressed repeatedly in the press release. This ‘unaffiliated’ public is also cast as a public that is ‘disenchanted’ from political parties and the ‘official’ political process:

“ITV has commissioned Vote for Me at a time of widespread concern that many people [...] feel apathetic towards political parties and that politics is irrelevant. In the last General Election [2001], voter turnout was down to 59%, the lowest since 1918, with only 39% of 18-34 year olds voting. Following the election, the challenge was issued to broadcasters to engage more people in the democratic process” (Vote for Me press release, 14 April 2004, p.1).

This press release works to summon up a narrative of democratic decline and democratic deficit. By emphasising that voter turnout in the 2001 General Election was “the lowest since 1918” and that “only 39% of 18-34 year olds” participated in this poll, this text has the effect of presenting Parliamentary politics as something that is increasingly unpopular. This kind of electoral politics is cast as ‘irrelevant’, particularly to younger people suggesting that this form of political practice could gradually be becoming completely out-moded and out-dated.

Despite its concerned tone, ITV’s voice in this extract is also itself highly evaluative, offering, as it does, a particular diagnosis of the cause of the overall decline in electoral turnout. The text uses statistics to back up its claim that many people “feel apathetic towards party politics and that politics is irrelevant”. The decline in levels of electoral participation is attributed to a particular set of public *feelings*. The press release quotes from the conclusion to a 2003 Hansard commissioned report entitled *A Tale of Two Houses: The House of Commons, The Big Brother house and the People at Home* authored by Professor Stephen Coleman:

“The way to liberate political democracy from its current cultural ghetto requires a new conception of two-way accountability’ a creative and exciting use of the new technologies of interactivity and the nurturing of genuine respect between political junkies and the Big Brother generation.” (Vote for Me press release, 14 April 2004, p.1 citing Coleman, 2003)

In this extract those who are still engaged with democratic party politics are cast as 'political junkies', occupants of a 'political ghetto' and part of a generation out of touch with the 'new'. Followers of Big Brother, meanwhile, are positioned as a 'new' generation of cultural and technological early-adopters. Despite operating beyond the domain and conventions of party politics this 'new' generation is cast as a group who have enthusiastically adopted various new participative practices. 'New' technologies are cast here as 'exciting and creative' because, according to this account, they facilitate 'new' forms of 'interactivity' and 'new' forms of 'two-way accountability'.

The Big Brother generation is constituted as a distinct public: one which has moved on, progressed, and embraced 'new times' in a way that those left stranded in the political ghetto and still engaged with party politics have not yet achieved. 'New times' in this account are times marked by less formal and less institutionally-located forms of conduct. They are characterised by practices cast here as more transparent. They offer viewers 'warts and all' unmediated access allowing them to participate more flexibly from home and to vote by telephone. They are associated with forms of self-expression that are 'authentic' and which are assumed here to be absent from more professionalised forms of mainstream political performance.

Two parallel publics are differentiated from each other in this press release (a public participating through established forms of electoral politics and a public participating through 'new' forms of reality television). The press release also works to privilege one of these publics above the other by linking the public of 'new' forms of reality television to 'creative and exciting' 'new' conceptions of interactivity and accountability.

Rhetorically, the press release therefore presents a contrast between a public represented by political parties and a culture of participation in which a public is empowered to represent and organise itself. This contrast is between an 'old' public made up of 'political junkies' who occupy a 'cultural ghetto' and a new vibrant and healthy participative public brought into being through its relations with new and more interactive technologies. By casting one of these publics as 'new' and thereby positioning the other as 'old', the press release historicises the emergence of these publics – positioning the former in the vanguard of 'new times' and the latter as increasingly outmoded.

The implication here is that the technologies and forms of participation associated with reality television initiatives are, for this new public, more credible, more legitimate, more ongoing and direct and even more democratic. By associating Vote for Me with these new and 'progressive' forms of technology and participation it is cast as a means through which public engagement in politics might be updated for new times; new times in which popular sovereignty and more ongoing and direct popular control over politics can finally become a *reality*.

A key tension arising from this rhetoric is the tension between the idea that this new public is a public of difference, a public fragmented along individualistic lines into a multiplicity of different actors with shifting allegiances, loyalties and identities; and the idea of this public as a national public, a public that is to some extent homogenous or at least potentially unifiable.

In contrast to Harrow Open Budget, which depicted its project as one that accommodated difference through notions of demographic representativeness, Vote for Me collapses difference in this press release by privileging of notions of individual authenticity. Vote for Me presented the public of this programme as a

national public, an apolitical public and an unrepresented public. The Vote for Me press release positioned this venture as a pragmatic endeavour designed to make politics more relevant, accessible and engaging to a public disengaged and disenchanted by mainstream politics. In this way ITV casts itself as a progressive and socially responsible organisation which is responsive to a changing public landscape, one where new television formats might have the potential to empower the disenfranchised and address the UK's democratic deficit. ITV are therefore assumed here to have the expertise to adapt an already popular light entertainment format so that it can be utilised to engage large numbers of people in politics.

A different way of understanding Vote for Me emerges through an examination of how relations between ITV and its publics are ordered in this press release. Despite Vote for Me being constructed here as a participant-centred venture, publics seem to have no voice in this text. The way in which ITV allows itself the authority to mediate between publics and forms of electoral Parliamentary politics is also unquestioned. While the role of mediator can imply a technical facilitative role, mediation may also imply more managerial, regulative or constitutive forms of action. The status of ITV as a public authority and mediator and the precise role of the publics to which Vote for Me makes its appeal, remain ambiguous. The idea of translating a light entertainment format into a new and improved democratic process is presented in the press release as non-problematic and a commonsensical. Consequently it is important to assess how ITV and those it enrolled to participate in this venture each did this in practice.

4.2 Vote for Me as public assembly

This section concentrates on the design and management of Vote for Me as a form of public assembly. The data here is based on an evening I spent as a member of the studio audience observing the making of the programme, and on a transcript I made of the five episodes of this television series. My aim is to identify and discuss the kinds of publics and forms of publicness summoned up and performed by this initiative and to identify some of the effects of this attempt to construct politics as *pleasurable, fun and entertaining*.

I want to highlight here some of the practices that the makers of this programme generated to reconcile the different conceptions of publicness identified in section 4.1. These practices, I want to contend, position participants as actors who, in order to be 'successful', have to straddle the different 'realities' of Parliamentary politics and reality television in their performance. The 'reality' of reality television, in this setting, is one in which ideas of ordinariness, authenticity and raw talent are privileged; while the 'reality' of Parliamentary politics, at least according to Vote for Me, is a reality in which a certain set of professional skills and competences are seen to be of key importance.

The contest, as enacted through Vote for Me, aims to find, in the words of its presenter, "a new type of politician" (Vote for Me transcript, episode 1). This means an individual with the capacity to enact, articulate and negotiate each of these realities by performing in ways judged to be ordinary, authentic and talented whilst also demonstrating the professional skills and competencies associated with being a successful MP and career politician. Vote for Me, as will be shown in this section of this chapter, constructs and resources forms of participatory politics by generating a sequence of activities designed to 'test' or 'challenge' the ability of contestants to perform in these different ways. These activities were designed to showcase

contestants and enable viewers to engage with and participate in the selection of the eventual winner of this contest.

The five nightly episodes of *Vote for Me* were comprised of a range of different kinds of practices and activities that were enacted in an order that was determined in advance of the broadcast of this programme. Constructing a participative public assembly in this setting was in part a discursive process entailing the generation of roles and the performance of tasks, and in part a series of material practices that required participants (both those at home and those enrolled as contestants) to become involved, entangled and implicated in various temporalities, spatialities, activities and pathways that were not wholly of their own creation. The practices through which *Vote for Me* were constructed, rather than the participants, shaped the design of many of the key aspects of this initiative. While participants were invited to become involved, they did not have a role in decisions about when, where and for how long they would be able to participate or, indeed, over what kinds of activities they would be required to participate in. This did not mean that participants could not shape their own performances, I will show in section 4.3 that they did. However, it does mean that there was a certain set of constraints on participation in this setting. I now want to elaborate on how this public assembly was designed in a little more detail.

The three main phases to the *Vote for Me* programme were: the pre-audition phase; the auditions themselves; and the phase during which the 'live' finals were enacted. The first two of these phases were depicted in episode 1 of *Vote for Me*, while the finals, broadcast live, took place over the course of episodes 2-5. I want to outline and then reflect on each of these phases in turn, identifying the particular versions of publicness and participatory politics they each privileged.

Episode 1 of Vote for Me opened on location and was shot in the shops and on the high streets of an unnamed Northern town and interviewed apparently ordinary members of the British public:

Interviewer: What do you think of politicians?

Respondent 1: Untruthful most of the time...

Respondent 2: They're notorious liars...

(Vote for Me, episode 1, 10 January 2005)

This first section of the programme depicted a selection of people of different gender, age, ethnicity and accent deriding mainstream politics and Parliamentary politicians. Using a journalistic 'vox pop' documentary style, short extracts of testimony were edited together and presented in a way that positioned these interviewees' comments as representative of a current national public opinion.

Narrator: We don't seem to like politicians very much [...] and we don't like politics much either [...] so tonight, you get the chance to put things right [...] We've begun a nationwide search for a new type of politician.

(Vote for Me, episode 1, 10 January 2005)

The use of these 'vox pop' interviews and this narration combined with the presentation of extracts from archival news footage depicting record low turn-outs in the 2003 European Elections, worked together to construct an image of a UK public disengaged from and disaffected with mainstream politics. Like the press release analysed in section 4.1, these forms of address summon up the idea that this disengaged public are more representative of the UK population as a whole than

that section of the population who continue to engage with mainstream politics. By hailing a 'we' and 'you' who is dissatisfied in the extract above, again Vote for Me seems here to be appealing to a public which does not feel represented by or engaged with 'old' style Parliamentary politics its politicians.

The narrator, having positioned Vote for Me in a campaigning as well as a mediating role, then introduced three celebrities cast as champions and advocates both of this initiative and of the public that this programme aimed to address and assist. These figures – ex-Sun editor Kelvin McKenzie, ex-ITV political editor John Sergeant and GMTV host Lorraine Kelly – would together be the panel of judges given the task of evaluating of contestants' performances. These figures were presented as proxies for the public – three individuals with the capacity to mediate and champion this 'new' form of participatory public politics.

McKenzie, Sergeant and Kelly were shown engaging in practices that worked to cast them as highly committed and energetic individuals with the ability to mediate between the domains of popular culture and formal politics. Each was introduced as a figure with wide experience of reporting on and dealing with politics via tabloid newspaper, television news or daytime television media. Each was shown in this introductory section of Vote for Me travelling around the streets of Britain, talking to 'ordinary' people in their 'natural' habitat, handing out promotional material for the new show and inviting people to apply to become a contestant.

John Sergeant: [Being interviewed in a hotel room as part of opening section of the programme] ...Politics, real normal politics, is in everybody's lives and that came out immediately when we started to talk to people.

Respondent: [Scene cuts to John Sergeant interviewing young Asian youth on street] ...well, I'd make it better for the youngsters around here... [Interrupted]

John Sergeant: Yeah...

Respondent: [Continues] ...because they've hardly got nothing to do...

(Vote for Me, episode 1, 10 January 2005)

The second phase of Vote for Me – the audition stage – was, like the first stage, pre-recorded and presented and broadcast as part of episode one. It was only at this stage that viewers were given an indication of the form of public assembly that would be used to conduct Vote for Me. It was a format that would have been instantly recognisable to viewers familiar with the large number of reality television series that have been played out on British television screens in recent years. In common with many of these other programmes, Vote for Me invited contestants to submit themselves to a series of challenges, challenges designed to allow contestants' performances to be inspected by judges and by viewers at home. Having long used this approach as a means of discovering new characters and talents in other forms of reality television, ITV would now adapt this approach to find a new kind of public politician.

To access the Vote for Me auditions and the chance to appear on national television, prospective contestants were required to submit to an application process. Part of this required prospective participants to write their own Vote for Me political 'manifesto'. These manifestos were then assessed as part of the application process by the three judges who were tasked with selecting 60 applicants from the 'hundreds' that reportedly applied. These 60 were then invited to attend the Vote for Me auditions.

The manifesto test was the first of a series of tests (or 'challenges' as they were more typically referred to) in which contestants were invited to participate as part of the Vote for Me auditions. During these auditions contestants were also challenged to deliver a one-minute 'speech' on their manifesto, tested for half an hour on their 'lobbying' skills and challenged to perform, one-by-one, in short bouts of 'cross-examination'. This format was presented as being systematic and fair, as a meritocratic platform which gave contestants the opportunity to display their skills and ideas. The format gave judges and viewers at home the chance to observe and evaluate contestants' performances and to do so in a way that was efficient and presentable in a familiar reality television format.

Despite the apparent simplicity and accessibility of the testing regime deployed in this setting, the programme's format nevertheless placed contestants under extreme pressure. For their auditions, contestants were required to stand or sit alone in front of a large Vote for Me logo facing the panel of judges and a battery of television cameras, under the harsh glare of spotlights in a darkened television studio, knowing too that there was a high probability of their imminent elimination from the contest. After each round of testing a large proportion of contestants were eliminated: 35 of the 60 new recruits were expelled after the first test of the audition stage; of the 25 that remained another ten were 'sent home' following the second challenge and of these 15, a further eight were eliminated following the last of the tests screened as part of the audition stage.

Using this format, the auditions reduced the 'hundreds' who, the narrator claimed, had applied to compete in this contest, to just seven contestants over the course of just four rounds of testing. What it is critical to note about this 'auditioning' process, however, is that despite Vote for Me being cast as a participatory and inclusive venture decisions, about which contestant should and should not pass through the

short-listing process undertaken during this phase of the programme, were taken without any direct viewer input or involvement. This was only possible because *Vote for Me* drew on a familiar set of reality television conventions. Using these conventions *Vote for Me* worked hard to position the auditioning process – and, by extension, this form of participatory politics – as *inherently* popular, inclusive and participative. Three of the ways the makers of this programme went about this stand out and are worthy of note here.

First, the makers of this programme recruited a set of contestants who together represented a heterogeneous and anti-elitist concept of the public to which this show was making its appeal. Images of diversity were constructed in various ways: by montages of scenes depicting contestants with different genders, ethnicities and ages or, by demonstrating to viewers that the contestants taking part in these auditions used a range of modes and styles of public address. Such depictions of heterogeneity included, for example, a contestant dressed as a Morris Dancer, an Asian man in a Union Jack outfit and a man who dramatically threw a home-made banner across the performance space.

The idea that these contestants reflected a heterogeneous public was also invoked through the programmes narration. This was evident at one point when the narrator told viewers that contestants had a “spectrum” of views, or on another when he described them as a “mixed bag” ranging from “students to grannies, from bankers to druids” or at yet another point when he announced that contestants included in their ranks “a single mum, a curry house owner and at least one ex-con and a gardener” (*Vote for Me* transcript, episode 2). Through such means the makers of *Vote for Me* depicted these recruits as being more representative of the publics of ‘new’ modern Britain than the group of politicians sitting in Parliament. This

technique also worked, by extension, to construct these auditions as an inclusive, participative and inherently popular undertaking.

A second means through which this initiative was cast as inclusive, participative and inherently popular, was through the positioning of the panel of judges as proxies for the new, or at least under-represented public, of Vote for Me. The judges were depicted as being popular and slightly anti-establishment figures in their own right and thereby also as champions of under-represented publics. Furthermore, these judges were also cast as figures with the ability to mediate and distinguish, on the public's behalf, not only between different contestants' performances but also between the worlds of politics and popular culture and entertainment.

The third way in which programme makers cast Vote for Me as inclusive, participative and inherently popular was by staging and constructing this contest as an unmediated, unscripted and therefore also a highly unpredictable 'real' drama. There was a focus, during the audition phase, on the *spectacle* of this process with sequences edited together in ways that highlighted vivid differences between different contestants. One scene, for example, showed a man light-heartedly proposing a "bank holiday in honour of [the light entertainment television presenter] Bruce Forsyth"; quickly followed by another talking earnestly about the need to address third-world debt which was quickly followed by another calling for the re-introduction of public flogging (Vote for Me transcript, episode 2). As with other shows of this kind, viewers were also granted behind-the-scenes access to contestants. In these scenes, Vote for Me's presenter was shown questioning contestants prior to their auditions about their tactics or their emotional well-being before the scene which cut to their 'real' audition performances. This was then, on many occasions, followed by a post-performance interview. Using these strategies, Vote for Me constructed a sense of the 'reality' of this reality TV programme, offering

viewers access to different aspects of the event, including the highs and lows of contestants' experiences.

While the decision to position *Vote for Me* around a set of challenges could be seen as a way of making this contest systematic and fair, it was also a means of imbuing this venture with dramatic qualities. Understood as a television serial, rather than an example of participative politics, *Vote for Me* had an in-built narrative structure that worked to sustain viewers' attention between one episode and the next. This venture was also dramatic because of the way it was cast – involving a combination of ordinary people, celebrities (the panel of judges) and viewers at home – and because of the way that viewers at home were themselves, as will be shown below, given a role in the direction of *Vote for Me*'s narrative during the 'live' finals phase. Given that a venture of this type had not been conducted before in the UK, the combination of these elements lent *Vote for Me* novelty value and worked to generate a frisson of excitement and risk.

However, the way the programme was structured offered programme makers a way of dealing with an important tension in the way it had constructed the public for this initiative. Key here is the tension generated by constructing *Vote for Me*'s public as a diverse and fragmented public, a public of difference; and the way *Vote for Me* summoned up the idea that it might unify the British public by identifying and generating some kind of consensus around the selection of a single 'winning' contestant. The programme's structure, as has already been indicated above, allowed the performances of different kinds of public recruits to be showcased in a way that allowed these contestants to be judged and 'whittled down' through a succession of apparently fair and transparently evaluated 'challenges'. The process was a recursive and iterative one, with each activity building on the results of the last, and each phase moving the whole process forward to its conclusion – the

selection of the agreed-upon winner, who represented this public of difference in a way that was somehow consented to by those involved.

Inscribed into the design of the Vote for Me format and proposition were ideas not only about the constitution of its public but also ideas of what the results of this public's actions would be. Vote for Me's public was constituted both as a public of difference and as a public with the capacity to act with the right kind of facilitation and management, in a positive way and in a unified, collective fashion. It was a public that was assumed to have the capacity to produce political results that were somehow better than those produced through more conventionally mediated political processes. To investigate these claims I now want to turn to an exploration of how these forms of politics were performed and negotiated during the enactment of the programmes.

4.3 Participating in Vote for Me

In order to highlight some of the forms of politics attendant on the enactment of participants' performances during Vote for Me, this part of the chapter will highlight some of the ways in which contestants were shown to use the resources they were offered, and how judges and viewers responded to their performances. As has already been outlined above, one of the ways in which Vote for Me summoned up the idea that this programme represented a novel approach to politics was by recruiting a diverse group of contestants who exhibited a wide range of different characteristics. Taken together, the contestants showcased at the audition stage, exhibited qualities that allowed them, as a group, to be positioned both as objects of reality television entertainment and objects of certain kinds of rather more earnest

political evaluation. The contestants, the panel of judges, the viewers and the programme makers enrolled into this setting were all required to negotiate the demands of each of these different 'realities'.

For example, as far as the contestants were concerned, some were shown emphasising their potential to be political entertainers, by dressing up, dancing or enacting a dramatic routine (one contestant even took off her clothes during the 'lobbying' challenge); while other contestants were shown mimicking 'real' politicians by taking on a highly polished and serious professional persona.

A further set of contestants attempted to combine these modes of performance by presenting themselves in ways that fitted, in one way or another, the demands of each of these 'realities'. Even amongst this latter group, there was a range of ways that contestants enacted this manoeuvre. One man, for example, introduced his policy proposals via a set of lyrics he had written, accompanying himself on the guitar as he sang during his audition. Others worked to engage judges and viewers with their policy-ideas by emphasising their credentials as 'ordinary', 'authentic' representatives of the British public. These performances were rendered 'authentic' by relating policy proposals to biographical experiences thereby highlighting contestants' credentials as 'non-elite' public representatives. All, apart from one of the contestants who progressed through the auditions to the final phase of this competition, presented themselves in such ways.

This meant that the contestants eliminated as a result of the auditioning process were, in the main, those that the judges considered either not to have sufficient political credibility, those considered not to have sufficient 'raw talent', or those lacking an ability to display a satisfactory degree of integrity or authenticity as individuals. Each judge had a favourite contestant and particular biases. These

biases were particularly acute in the case of Kelvin McKenzie who was seen cheering on any contestant with right-wing inclinations. A more centrist bias for contestants with environmental or social-justice agendas could be observed, however, in the preferences of Lorraine Kelly.

There were, perhaps inevitably, given the way this panel of judges had been selected and combined, clashes between McKenzie and Kelly. While the disagreements between the judges could be seen as another means through which *Vote for Me* was rendered an engaging and exciting spectacle, these disagreements also highlighted to viewers some of the different ways these judges negotiated the competing demands of the programme.

The extracts that follow are taken from three scenes in episode 1 in which the three judges are shown disagreeing about the criteria they should use to evaluate contestants' auditions. The first extract is taken from a conversation between judges following the performance of a young male contestant with a strong East London accent who proposed a raft of hard-line policies including the introduction of a ten year minimum sentence for those accused of burglary and public flogging for those found guilty of violent offences:

John Sergeant: ...OK. Strong hard-line message, I think you should have liked that, Kelvin?

Kelvin McKenzie: ...I did, I bloody enjoyed that...

Lorraine Kelly: [Acting surprised] ...did you like *him*???

Kelvin McKenzie: ...I did, I thought... [Interrupted]

Lorraine Kelly: ...would you vote for him???

Kelvin McKenzie: ...would I vote for him?... I'd make him probably Prime Minister tomorrow, I should think...

(Vote for Me, episode 1, 10 January 2005)

The second extract is taken from an exchange between Kelvin McKenzie and John Sergeant, following their audition of Julie, a 'single mum' and council tenant, again from East London, who presented proposals for reforming the council housing system by giving tenants more responsibility for managing their own estates:

Kelvin McKenzie: I thought she did fantastically well... considering she has probably not got a single political bone in her body. And what she was saying... [Interrupted]

John Sergeant: ...hasn't got a political bone???...

Kelvin McKenzie: ...no, no, she hasn't!...

John Sergeant: ...hold on, we're meant to be looking for people with political bones...

Kelvin McKenzie: ...no, no, we're looking for people who are going to become voices of people currently disenfranchised. And our viewers will understand a lot more of what she said than they will understand some of the gobbledegook spoken by either Oliver Letwin or Gordon Brown or the Lib Dem guy...

(Vote for Me, episode 1, 10 January 2005)

The third extract, once again from the auditions, is taken from an exchange between the judges following the audition of Kevin, a thalidomide survivor and disability-rights campaigner from Liverpool, who was shown in his audition appealing for a fight against various kinds of 'injustice':

Lorraine Kelly: [clapping and smiling] I liked him. I liked him a lot....

John Sergeant: [interrupting]...are you meant to clap as a judge?

Lorraine Kelly: I'm sorry but I did like him... and not because he's in a wheelie I just thought he talked an awful lot of sense...

John Sergeant: Yeah... I thought he was great...

Kelvin McKenzie: Mmmm... I thought he was ho hum to be honest with you...

(Vote for Me, episode 1, 10 January 2005)

The first extract centres on a disagreement between the judges over a contestant's policy proposals. Disagreements such as this, played out over the course of this programme, were largely based on pre-existing ideological affiliations articulated by, and played-out between, Lorraine Kelly and Kelvin McKenzie. The staging of these differences and their negotiation became one of the ways in which this panel of judges, as well as their decisions, could be depicted as decisions that had been arrived at through a process of open and deliberate discussion. The selection of this panel of judges worked as one way of maximising the possibilities of a range of different contestants, performing varying ideological affiliations and styles, being selected to move forward through the auditioning process. The choice of judges also worked to construct and re-construct, at each stage, the prospect of Vote for Me becoming an exciting and hard-fought-over political competition between recruits who were substantially different from one another.

The second and third extracts centre on disagreements about the personal qualities the judges should demand from contestants. McKenzie, in the second extract, asserts that the viewers of this programme would relate directly to Julie because of her lack of 'political bones' and, by extension, because she therefore represents a

more 'ordinary' and 'authentic' form of politics than that exemplified by 'gobbledegook'-speaking career politicians such as Oliver Letwin and Gordon Brown. John Sergeant questions McKenzie's judgement in the third of these extracts, suggesting that the panel of judges needs to look for someone with, rather than without, 'political bones'. Sergeant's assertion here is that judges should be looking for a contestant with the set of skills, competencies or talents that, he asserts, will be needed to perform as an effective career-politician in a Westminster context.

The extract below shows another example of a scene from the auditions. This shows Lorraine Kelly enunciating a similar success criterion to that expressed by John Sergeant in the second extract (above). The extract below is part of a scene during the lobbying test in which a contestant questions Kelly to find out what, for her, constitutes a successful politician:

Contestant: Which politician's style and approach do you think we should be emulating?

Lorraine Kelly: Ooooh... I think Tony Blair...ahhh... when he's good, he's very good...

(Vote for Me, episode 1, 10 January 2005)

Former Prime Minister Blair is cast in somewhat contradictory role here. For despite Blair's credentials as an establishment politician, Kelly nevertheless positions him as a role model for the kind of new, non-elitist public politics that Vote for Me aims to stimulate. Despite the disputes and confusions generated through the staging and presentation of exchanges such as these, the judges are eventually shown, as part of episode 1, agreeing amongst themselves on a short-list of finalists. Among the finalists announced at the end of episode 1 are: a breast-cancer survivor campaigning on a single issue (the need to regulate the construction of mobile

phone masts); a young Asian NHS doctor proposing a set of changes to the way that NHS hospitals are run; a wheelchair-bound thalidomide survivor who stands for economic redistribution and equal rights for disabled people; and a 'single mum' with a range of ideas for improving the way council estates could be managed.

None of these finalists was particularly controversial except for one: a contestant named Rodney Hylton-Potts who stood on a platform of anti-immigration and proposed that convicted paedophiles should be castrated. He boasted of the time he had spent in prison following his conviction for a million-pound fraud offence, an experience that he claimed had made him a 'street-fighter'. Kelly and Sergeant were united in the view that Hylton-Potts should be eliminated at the audition stage. Kelvin McKenzie meanwhile was adamant that Hylton-Potts should be offered a place in the finals because "the people [rather than the judges] should have the chance to decide" (Vote for Me transcript, episode 1) whether this contestant should be allowed to stand. Despite being outnumbered McKenzie won the argument and Hylton-Potts was offered a place in the finals, a decision that was later to prove significant. With debates concerning immigration raging in the UK media at the time at which Vote for Me was screened, to offer a contestant with extreme views on this issue a place in the finals might simply be seen as one further way in which this programme positioned itself as being different from mainstream forms of political programming. This also courted controversy, however, rendering Vote for Me an even more sensational event than it already was.

The finals themselves were staged over the course of four further programmes and predominantly in front of a 'live' studio audience at ITV's large London studios. The main difference between this stage of the series and the pre-audition and audition stages was that viewers at home were repeatedly implored to phone or text the programme to 'elect' their contestant of choice. Viewers could cast their votes, as

frequently as they wished by means of a premium rate telephone line the number of which was displayed at the top of the screen throughout these episodes. So while for viewers each of the judges was still very much present and given the opportunity to pass judgement on contestants performances during these episodes, the absolute power they were able to exercise over contestants was withdrawn at this stage and given over to viewers, with their proxies also present in the form of a studio audience.

I attended the recording of episode two of Vote for Me as a member of the studio audience. Aspects of this experience are useful to recall here since they once more highlight some of those ways in which the reality of this 'live' programme were constructed.

Registering my arrival at ITV's studios on London's Southbank, the receptionist instructed me to leave the building and walk down an adjacent alleyway and queue at the audience entrance. Joining the small crowd outside in the rain, I found myself ushered into a queue by a set of people in branded bibs. The significance of these branded bibs became apparent only after talking to several fellow-members of the queue. On asking them how they heard about Vote for Me and how they had obtained tickets to attend this evening's recording, the people to whom I spoke told me they were registered with a company called Applause Store which notified them on an ongoing basis by email about free tickets that were available for attending the recordings of different kinds of television production. It seemed the job of recruiting a public to populate and participate (as a studio audience) in this production had been contracted out to a company who specialised in providing applause on demand. As I quickly realised however, no chances were taken in this respect. We had been instructed to arrive an hour before the live broadcast and much of this time was used to rehearse certain kinds of audience behaviour. For this the floor

manager tutored us in the kind of exuberance a studio audience was required to perform. There should be no stamping of feet but lots of shouting, cheering and clapping whenever he gave the signal and, he instructed, all noise should stop when he gave a different signal.

During the finals, contestants were required to continue to submit themselves to various challenges. These included more tests of their speech-making skills, further bouts of cross-examination, a 'test' that required them to 'doorstep' members of a local public in a suburb of Liverpool, one with a notoriously low electoral turn-out rate, a role that required them to take questions from the public of a radio phone-in and a test in which they faced a group of lobby journalists at a mock press conference.

The challenges the remaining contestants were required to undertake, as in the auditions, were presented as tests in their own right. However, during this phase of the contest, judges also talked about these challenges as activities that offered viewers the chance to see, and reflect upon, how much contestants had progressed and learned over the course of the contest. Based on the remaining contestants' performances, the three judges increasingly took it upon themselves to offer the finalists advice on how they could improve their candidacies. Despite the judges having, until this point in the contest, looked favourably upon performances that highlighted the 'ordinariness' or 'authenticity' of different contestants, the judges increasingly criticised these same contestants for their apparent lack of political professionalism and competence as the competition became more intense.

By this phase in the contest, however, a great deal of inconsistency could be observed in the ways that the judges evaluated contestants. In episode 2, for example, one of the contestants judged not to be sufficiently charismatic was

castigated on the basis that he was ‘too much like a real politician’. As the competition intensified, however, so the judges’ advice for the remaining contestants became more and more pointed with, on some occasions, judges actually demanding certain kinds of performance from contestants. Illustrating this point, in the extract that follows John Sergeant spells out a set of rules that he asserts should be followed whenever contestants come into contact with the press:

John Sergeant: [Addressing finalists] The golden rule is to decide... that you decide, as the politician, what you are going to say... that the press don’t force you onto the defensive. If you are asked a difficult question, you try and deflect it. But the key thing is to decide, before the news conference or the speech... whatever it is... say three points that you are going to get across, and then see... or ask yourself at the end of the session if you got those points across; and if you did, you’ve won.

(Vote for Me, episode 4, January 13 2005)

This particular piece of advice was spelled out prior to a scene in which viewers were presented with highlights of some of the contestants’ performances at a mock press conference where each contestant was challenged to defend their policy in front of a group of lobby journalists. In the clip of pre-recorded footage shown to viewers and the studio audience alike, Kevin – one of the four remaining contestants – was shown being caught-out when questioned about one of his policies. Following this clip, Sergeant and Kelvin McKenzie castigated Kevin, accusing him of avoiding this journalist’s questions about one of the financial implications of his policy. The extract below highlights a part of the exchange that followed between two of the judges and Kevin:

John Sergeant:	OK... alright Kevin, I’m afraid you made an awful mistake in that film didn’t you... when you said it wasn’t up to you to work out what the figures were?
----------------	---

Kevin: Well it isn't, I'm not the Chancellor of the Exchequer!

John Sergeant: No, but hold on, you're standing for office... errr... do you want power without responsibility?

Kevin: No... what you asked us to do as candidates was to put forward our principles and our ideas and our policies not...[interrupted]

John Sergeant: ...and it really doesn't matter how it is paid for?

Kevin: [pointing to the large television screen behind him referring to the film that had just been shown to the studio audience and viewers at home depicting his performance during the mock press-conference challenge]
...well actually that sentence was taken out of context and I actually said, yeah, put up taxes, and that's an honest answer...

John Sergeant: OK, so you would put up taxes... and what taxes would you put up?

Kevin: Income taxes...[interrupted]

Kelvin McKenzie: ...to what level???

Kevin: mmm... 50% for the really wealthy...

Kelvin McKenzie: What do you call the *really* wealthy???

Kevin: The money you're on!!! [audience cheer loudly and clap]

(Vote for Me, episode 4, 13 January 2005)

This scene demonstrates the disagreement between Kevin and two of the judges about the approach that should be used to evaluate his performance. Kevin asserts that he, and presumably the other contestants, had been asked to “put forward our principles and our ideas and our policies” implying that these elements of their performances, rather than their knowledge of the detailed financial or technical implications of their policy ideas, should have been the focus of the judges’ critical attention. In protesting that he was *not* the Chancellor of the Exchequer, this contestant emphasised that he was not claiming to be a ‘real’ politician but rather an ordinary person acting as a ‘new’ kind of public politician.

Kevin’s attempts to defend himself are also noteworthy because he claims here that the remarks he was shown making in the film had been “taken out of context”, attributing his misrepresentation to the programme’s editing process. Pressed further Kevin then implied that, had the film had been edited *correctly*, it would have shown him announcing his plan to fund his policy proposals through a rise in taxation levels. With neither McKenzie nor Sergeant willing to back down, Kevin then successfully halted McKenzie’s attacks by turning the tables on him, entertaining and thereby enrolling the support of the studio audience in the process.

An exchange of this length between a contestant and one or other of the judges would have been impossible during the audition stage of the contest because of the number of contestants still in the running at that time. During the final stages of Vote for Me, however, the remaining contestants were encouraged to elaborate on their policy proposals and personal credentials in order to give viewers more information on which to base their voting decisions. Those contestants were offered significant opportunities to publicise both their policies and themselves, and each finalist did in fact take-up the chances each was given.

All but one of these contestants encountered more and more problems as they progressed. One reason for this was that more airtime was also given to the judges during the latter stages of the contest with the result that each of the contestants was subjected to increasingly fierce and complicated lines of questioning. Some of these forms of interrogation were directed at contestants' personal characteristics and focused on their integrity and credentials as 'ordinary', 'authentic' figures with the capacity and talent to represent under-represented publics.

The majority of these questions sought to probe contestants' capacities and skills as prospective 'professional' Westminster politicians. For all but one of the contestants these increasingly long spells of 'live' airtime interrogation and inspection resulted in performances that appeared to be ever more self-defensive and unprofessional. Many of the contestants who lacked a detailed set of policies, or the experience of dealing with such questioning, came under intense criticism.

Despite being repeatedly chastised by the three judges during the finals (both on the basis of his personality and his policies), the one contestant who had seemingly developed ways of dealing with the Vote for Me format was Rodney Hylton-Potts. He not only progressed through each round of public voting, to the increasing frustration of the judges, but also developed a strategy to deal with the protracted bouts of questioning.

At the core of his strategy was the simple repetition of his small number policy ideas and slogans. Whenever given the opportunity, Hylton-Potts repeated that 'Britain is full; Britain is closed for Business', thereby effectively setting the media agenda and getting his core messages across in exactly the unwavering way that Sergeant had advised. Using this approach, Hylton-Potts showed an ability to manage

successfully his performances and his self-presentation in a way that the other contestants were simply unable to achieve.

So while other contestants were seen to be floundering and appeared exposed and out of their depth, Hylton-Potts appeared more and more self-assured and confident as the programme continued. By time *Vote for Me* had reached its fifth and final episode, Hylton-Potts was using the show to publicise his own 'Get Britain Back' website. To the visible dismay of the show's presenter and its panel of judges 'Rodders', as he was by this time known, was, in the programme's closing scene, declared *Vote for Me*'s overall winner.

Despite Hylton-Potts being written off as a "comedy fascist nutter" by *Vote for Me*'s presenter in a Sunday Times newspaper interview after his victory (The Sunday Times, Sunday 16 January 2005, accessed online), Hylton-Potts did go on to stand as a prospective parliamentary candidate in the Folkstone constituency, during the 2005 General Election. According to one newspaper diary column, Hylton-Potts' win and his decision to stand in the then leader of the Tory party's marginal Folkstone seat, did result in the decision to bring "his head-banging 'I believe' speech on immigration", forward several weeks (Independent, 27 January 2005, p.18). An anonymous Conservative Party Central Office source is quoted in the Independent article as saying: "We're in a massive panic about Rodney Hylton-Potts, who won ITV's *Vote for Me* reality show on Friday. He's contesting Michael's [Howard's] seat on an anti-immigration ticket, and we're terrified about it splitting the right-wing vote" (ibid.).

Given that Hylton-Potts went on to receive only 153 votes (or 0.3% of the overall vote) coming 7th out of the 9 candidates that stood in Folkestone, Conservative Party concerns given the hindsight of the 2005 Folkestone General Election result,

might not appear to have been well-founded. However, according to the Mediaweek website (accessed, February 2005), 1.2 million people had tuned in to Vote for Me when it was originally broadcast several weeks earlier. This was, according to this source, only 500,000 less than tuned into that evening's episode of the hit comedy Men Behaving Badly and 200,000 more than tuned into that evening's edition of BBC2's flagship news programme Newsnight. It would seem significant that while the UK Conservative party apparently took this initiative seriously, the voters (or the public) of Folkestone plainly did not.

4.4 Vote for Me and the constitution of publics and politics

I want to use this final section to reflect on the forms of publicness and politics that were summoned up and enacted by this public participation exercise. I will also begin here to explore the effects of these practices and their implications for the positioning of this exercise in the public participation typology generated in chapter 2.

According to the press release examined in section 4.1 the practice of party politics for an increasing number of people in the UK, is an outdated one. The press release implies that rising levels of political disengagement are also explained by the growing popularity of reality television and especially those forms which this genre affords. "To liberate political democracy from its current cultural ghetto", the press release asserts, will require "a new conception of two-way accountability" that uses the "creative and exciting [...] technologies of interactivity" (ITV press release, 14 April 2004, p.1 citing Coleman, 2006).

This press release presents those who remain engaged with conventional forms of politics but disengaged from developments in popular culture, as being an 'old' public. It juxtaposes this with a 'new' public that, while disengaged from party politics, is engaged with 'new' forms of popular culture. In practice, as I have shown in sections 4.2 and 4.3 of this chapter, *Vote for Me* began by summoning up this 'new' public and by positioning it as a benign, progressive and potentially transformative political force. However, by the conclusion of this initiative, this public was transmogrified into a force cast – at least by programme-makers – as a malign, reactionary and potentially dangerous public. Key to understanding this process is the identification and analysis of the two different images of politics and the two different narratives of the public invoked in this setting. I want to briefly reflect on each of these in turn.

The two modes of politics that were offered to viewers in ITV's press release, offered to enfranchise the disenfranchised in a different way. The first offered political redemption for the disenfranchised via the prospect of access to the technologies of reality television. These technologies were depicted as the means through which 'new' publics could represent, organise and effectively govern themselves. According to the press release, these technologies would facilitate further such social development, if only given the chance. Essential to the force of this argument is its implicit anti-establishment and populist character and key to its allure is the idea that the emergence of this self-organising public might enable a more humane, progressive, authentic and 'real' form of politics. At stake here is the decoupling of this 'new' politics from the idea that politics necessarily needs to be conducted through the arcane, formal and bureaucratic processes associated with mainstream party politics. Authentic, more informal and everyday modes of conduct and processes of direct and self-organised participation and representation are all positioned here as positive ideas. Drawing on these associations, a model of politics

is proposed in which new technologies will result in the emergence of new and more benign publics and forms of publicness, and consequently also new and more benign forms of politics.

Yet this image of 'new' politics had to be articulated with more conventional and traditional forms of politics in order to produce a 'candidate' who could renew Westminster politics by standing for parliament. These two different projects were articulated through Vote for Me which, it was hoped, would use the genre of 'reality TV' in engaging 'new' publics with pre-existing forms of politics – specifically, in this case, not only with the 2005 General Election, but also more broadly with the system of Parliamentary democracy.

In section 4.2 I traced some of the ways these projects were articulated with one another. Key here was the design of various challenges that tested contestants' abilities to perform both as authentic members of the UK public, and as competent would-be members of Parliament. As I showed in section 4.3, the articulations between these two forms of politics nevertheless shifted over the course of the programme, with 'new' political possibilities and 'unconventional' publics being brought to the fore in the early stages, but with an increasing focus in the later stages on performing as a potentially 'professional' politician.

One tension between the forms of politics invoked by this programme lies in the ambivalent relationship this initiative has to parliament, parliamentary elections, political parties and elected politicians. Vote for Me valorised 'real' people who were untouched by formal politics and untainted by membership of political parties. But it also associated 'real politics' with Parliament as well as parliamentary elections and those performing as 'real' career politicians. As I have shown, two different modes of practice in this way came to be held-up as real, side-by-side and often at the same

time: first, practices associated with 'conventional' reality television programmes in which participants are invited to perform and compete as 'real' people; and, second, practices associated with parliamentary politics in which politicians perform for publics and compete for votes as public representatives. Vote for Me did not, therefore, only enact 'new' politics; it was also closely tied to 'old' formal, electoral politics. Before looking at how these 'realities' performed I want briefly to consider another tension or antagonism that was inscribed into this exercise: that between concepts of the public as 'ordinary' and concepts of the public as 'extraordinary'.

One of the ways that Vote for Me set itself up as a venture that would make politics more relevant to 'ordinary' people was by constructing itself as an initiative that would identify an 'ordinary' member of the UK public to stand as a parliamentary candidate. This idea, that 'ordinary' people might be enrolled to construct forms of politics that are more relevant to them, is similar to that taken-up by another 2004 web-based initiative called YourParty.org.

This was a (now abandoned) attempt to start a new kind of political party whose policies would be generated as a result of public contributions to its website, rather than by established political practices dominated by career politicians. What was important about Vote for Me, however, was not only that it worked to enrol 'ordinary' people but also the way in which it offered contestants and viewers alike the possibility of a passage from ordinary to *extraordinary* public status. For Mehl such processes are at the core of reality television programmes such as Vote for Me. Such shows offer to reveal what Mehl calls "the mysteries of the star system" (2005:87); in other words, the offer of celebrity and the possibility of public fame and widespread public recognition.

Vote for Me worked to generate its authority by recruiting a set of contestants who together were taken to represent, and thereby minimise, the gap between the 'new' 'ordinary' public who appeared on the programme and the 'new' 'ordinary' public of reality television viewers whom programme-makers were targeting with this venture.

To enact this passage from ordinary to extraordinary members of the public, contestants were required to perform in the presence of various authorities: a 'live' studio audience; other media people; the authority conferred by being in a television studio; and the authority bestowed by what Gabler (2000:187) has called "the sanctification of the camera".

The prospect of a 'meritocratic' rise from 'ordinary' to 'extraordinary' public status was contingent on contestants overcoming a series of obstacles that Vote for Me put in their way. These included the auditioning process, the challenges of the 'live' finals and the 'test' of public 'election'.

This format worked to confer authority on those contestants who could navigate these obstacles. The implicit assumption inscribed into this format when offering viewers access to footage of these contestants performing under great pressure, was that by witnessing contestants' performances viewers (and judges) would have access to all the information they needed, to 'filter' out, systematically and fairly those contestants' who do not accurately represent 'the public'. The claim being mobilised here is that this process allows a single 'extraordinary' member of the public to emerge as the 'winner'.

Inevitably strains and tensions arise here once it is recognised that the authority of this process relies on its being able to deliver an 'ordinary' member of the public who would also be somehow different and 'extraordinary': a member of the public

who could enact their 'authenticity' *and* display the skills and talents needed to take on the role of an effective politician in Parliament.

Vote for Me presented its 'election' as a somewhat technical and deliberative (as well as fun) process. However, what is notable about this case is that instead of it resulting in any kind of straightforward public consensus it facilitated a range of different forms of contestation – particularly around the issue of what should and should not mark out an 'ordinary' from an 'extraordinary' member of the public or, in other words, a 'winning' from a 'losing' contestant.

The key moment in this initiative came when the most vocal of the three judges underwrote the political views and the eventual victory of Rodney Hylton-Potts. While Kelvin McKenzie may not have intended or expected this contestant to emerge as the winner of Vote for Me, McKenzie put his weight behind the idea that Hylton-Potts should be allowed to progress through the audition phase and appear as one of the finalists. This worked to legitimise Hylton-Potts as a potentially extraordinary member of the public and therefore as a possible winner of this contest. It was also a move that lent legitimacy to Hylton-Potts' discourse of crude nationalism. Once in the finals, Rodney-Hylton Potts made the most of his media management skills to appeal to a rather more reactionary 'disenfranchised' public than programme-makers had envisioned in their original press release.

The dominant discourse in the Vote for Me publicity material stressed that this initiative would result not only in the emergence of a more politically engaged public but also in a public that would somehow be more benign and progressive. The authority of Vote for Me, as it was constructed through this discourse, was challenged by the 'reality' of this venture. This reality demonstrated the fragility of these assumptions and the relative authority of a counter-discourse of politics along

with the ease with which this programme could be used for ends other than those anticipated (at least publicly) by programme-makers.

With the way now cleared for him by Kelvin McKenzie, Hylton-Potts used the airtime afforded to him by Vote for Me (and the wider authority and legitimacy that anti-immigration discourses were being given at that time in the tabloid press) to translate the anti-establishment sentiments invoked by this initiative in a way that propelled his own rather different political project.

In the press release, 'the establishment' was cast as a force holding back technological progress and, given the diversity of the group of contestants originally recruited for the Vote for Me auditions, a force also preventing the appearance of a fragmented, plural and potentially cosmopolitan British public. But in Hylton-Potts' rendition, an ordinary and authentic British public was an entity pitted against a detached and privileged liberal elite. So while ITV held out the possibility of a benign and inclusive (if nationally-bounded) political village, Hylton-Potts's account divided the British population into authentic and inauthentic UK subjects. By doing this he was able to promote successfully the idea that it was immigrants and paedophiles that threatened Britain's political integrity. He was also, as a result of his performance and as a result of the new technologies of representation that were made available to him through this programme, able to chart a passage from an 'ordinary' to an 'extraordinary' member of the public.

From a research perspective this case study highlights the dangers of making particular sets of assumptions about how publics are constituted: for example through distinctions between ordinary people and elite politicians. The case study also highlights the political ambivalence of notions of public leadership and public self-organisation (or political self-governance).

Kelvin McKenzie played on this ambivalence when he made an argument for why Hylton-Potts should be offered a place in the Vote for Me finals. At the time he did not, explicitly at least, assert that Hylton-Potts should be offered the place on the basis of his views about UK immigration. Instead he said Potts should be offered a place because 'the people' (rather than the judges) should be given the authority to judge his fate. McKenzie therefore summoned up the idea that practices of public self-organisation and political self-governance should be given authority over the 'liberal' opinions and powers of his fellow 'expert' judges. Programme makers, if viewed here as self-appointed and self-authorised representatives of the UK public, also constitute their authority as mediators in a similarly ambivalent way as in the original press release by stressing its expertise as a cultural intermediary and as a technician of 'new' forms of popular 'democratic' reality television.

It is therefore important that tensions are recognised here between different 'realities' and different ideas of the public and the political that circulate throughout this initiative. These realities, representing different ideas of the public and the political are not, as I have attempted to demonstrate, mutually exclusive but are co-present in this setting. They were contested during the enactment of this programme both in various scenes involving Rodney Hylton-Potts and, for example, when the judges were shown arguing over evaluation criteria; when John Sergeant and Kelvin McKenzie disagreed over whether they wanted contestants with or without 'political bones'; and when one of the contestants challenged judges and programme-makers by saying that he hadn't been asked to demonstrate technical competence as a prospective politician but rather to express his personal ideas and beliefs.

The productive question that it is to dwell on here is the question of what, in this setting, were the effects of articulating these diverse ideas and associated forms of

practices associated with one another and not which of these multiple imaginaries of politics, publicness and participation are more 'real' or even more efficacious than the other.

There were of course multiple effects of these articulation processes, some of which were contradictory. These include the appearance of a particular kind of 'diverse' and 'new' public who were offered the publicity and a process through which they might potentially have become an MP. Many of these contestants did at least appear different from those MPs we see on the benches of the House of Commons. There were more women, more non-White faces, less middle class people as well as a disabled person. However, the ultimate winner was a white, middle class, able-bodied reactionary. The divergence of these outcomes is perhaps partly attributable to the way in which the programme makers constructed such a strong binary between 'old' and 'new' publics and 'old' and 'new' politics, connecting the 'old' with the out-dated and reactionary and the 'new' with the 'authentic', the contemporary and progressive. This did not open up the possibility that the 'new' and 'authentic' might be anything other than progressive.

A starting point for this chapter was an engagement with a group of contemporary media studies scholars. Coleman exemplified a group of scholars who have been hopeful about how reality television might be used democratically to 'empower' publics in politics. Couldry on the other hand was rather more sceptical about the democratising potential of reality television.

The case study of Vote for Me shows some of the complexities of this attempt to mediate politics through a form of reality television. This chapter has shown that despite Vote for Me being a temporary event, tensions between 'new' and 'old' ideas of the public and politics, those between what constitute an 'ordinary' and

‘extraordinary’ member of the public as well as tensions between what constitutes reactionary and progressive politics are all played out in this setting. The key point here is that this initiative has been shown to have opened-up as well as closed-down opportunities for forms of public performance and political contestation.

The results of this initiative are therefore rather ambivalent. Broadcast and telephone technologies were used to bring into relation the ‘strung-out’ domestic spaces of public television viewing; spaces of public broadcasting and media performance; the space of the nation and its ‘general public’; and the spaces of the UK Parliament and the public state institutions that are associated with it. Multiple political projects and the ways in which the actors contested the politics associated with each were all at stake and in play during the enactment of this event.

These and the other forms of contestation and complexity brought to the fore in this chapter highlight the importance of a nuanced account of Vote for Me’s public and political status. The ambiguities that are made visible by the form of empirically-grounded analysis that I have undertaken here raises the question of whether, or to what degree, it might be possible to generalise, theoretically, about initiatives of this kind. At the very least, the analysis undertaken in this chapter makes the case for further detailed empirical work of this kind.

Before introducing the next case study, I now want to return to the public participation typology generated in chapter 2 and make a few brief comments about what this analysis might imply for how this case was originally located in this schema.

		O R I E N T A T I O N		
		Deliberation	Pleasure	Transformation
D O M A I N	Governmental			
	Popular media		Vote for Me	
	Social movement			

Table 6: Vote for Me in the typology of public participation

Preliminary research into Vote for Me provided me with indications that this case would be enacted as a popular media venture that would privilege the delivery of public pleasure and entertainment. For these reasons it was placed as shown in the public participation typology (table 6). Having had the chance to investigate this case in more detail, the position of Vote for Me in this schema seems less fixed and more dynamic, and the boundaries between these different orientations and domains also seem rather more permeable than they appeared at first sight. There were, of course, many occasions when Vote for Me privileged the delivery of public pleasure and entertainment. Many of the contestants recruited in the audition stage undoubtedly only managed to secure their place because of their own personal (and potential) entertainment and novelty value. A highly dramatic narrative structure was also inscribed into the very format of this programme, offering viewers, at least vicariously, the experience of comedy, conflict, confusion and moments of stress and anxiety. These were all important constitutive elements of how this programme attempted to position itself as being more engaging than other more established forms of politics.

This chapter also highlights some of the ways in which Vote for Me set about constructing itself as a process that would enable viewers and judges to reflect on contestants performances and enact a form of deliberative conduct. Vote for Me cast itself as a deliberative process by: presenting itself as a contest that would be systematic and fair; offering viewers the 'truth' or at least 'direct' access to contestants' performances under the stress of a harsh, high-pressure regime of testing; and allowing viewers to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of different contestants and form their preference accordingly. Drawing on traditions of parliamentary debate and public service broadcasting and by recruiting a 'distinguished' panel of judges (both conventions loosely transposed from the judicial system) Vote for Me translated and tailored these repertoires and practices to suit the 'realities' of reality television.

This chapter highlights the ways that Vote for Me was set up as a venture geared to delivering forms of political transformation in addition to showing that this initiative was a pleasure oriented and deliberative venture. It was a venture that set out to engage the disengaged; remake politics for the audiences of reality television; allow the UK viewing public to express and represent itself via their televisions and telephones; and a venture that would somehow completely update politics and systems of democratic accountability for an era of interactive technology.

Vote for Me was a popular media initiative but, as I have shown, it was constructed in relation to pre-existing institutions and norms of liberal democratic parliamentary democracy in the UK. Contestants were not only standing in the Vote for Me election but also, potentially, for election to House of Commons as an MP. At least two of the Vote for Me finalists were also seasoned campaigners (the woman standing for election on an anti-mobile-phone-mast platform and Kevin, the disability

rights advocate). This illustrates how Vote for Me also functioned as a platform for members of 'the public' who might well be identified as social movement actors.

A denouement to Vote for Me (and this chapter) is suggested by an article that appeared in The Times shortly after the conclusion of this television event; the headline of the article read:

"Comedy fascist' is viewers' choice in TV election" (The Times, January 16, 2005, accessed online 25 January 2005)

Commenting on the victory of Hylton-Potts, Jonathan Maitland, the show's presenter, is quoted in this article as saying, "[I]t's not embarrassing that he [Hylton-Potts] won because we'll now respect our *real* politicians more." (Times, 16 January, italics added). Rather than write Vote for Me off as a complete failure, another way of viewing this programme would be to see it as an attempt by ITV to engage the UK public in a serious and popular political project – that of including the politically disenfranchised. Viewed in this light the project would also need to be seen as an attempt by ITV to position itself as socially responsible and publicly accountable. My point here is that there are a variety of possible ways in which this programme might be viewed (despite the victory of Hylton-Potts) and it is important to hold these different understandings – and these differing ideas of participative politics and publicness with which each works – in tension as this analysis develops in chapters 6-7.

Chapter 5

The 4th European Social Forum

The 4th European Social Forum was selected as the third of the case studies to be investigated here. This exercise was selected because it apparently privileged a particular kind *transformative* politics.

“The European Social Forum is, alongside Genoa and Seattle, one of the major events of the movement against neo-liberal globalisation and war, deregulation of labor and poverty, climate change and environmental degradation, violation of democratic rights and sexism, racism and the threat of the far right. Tens of thousands of activists participated in the first, second and third European Social Forums which took place in Florence (2002), Paris (2003) and London (2004). The same will happen in 2006: thousands of activists will meet in Athens in order to discuss the perspectives of the ‘movement of movements’, exchange their experiences from their struggle and organise coordination and solidarity networks [...] Today we are more confident than ever that another world is possible, where people will be before profit.” (Homepage of the 4th European Social Forum official website, accessed May 2006)

The 4th European Social Forum was held over four days on the outskirts of Athens, Greece, in a large and sprawling conference centre. Many thousands of activists were invited to join this exercise in transnational and translocal public participation. Its purpose, in common with other Social Forum events, was to develop resistance to ‘neo-liberal’ forms of globalisation and to foster the emergence of alternatives ‘from below’. 278 political meetings and 104 cultural activities were listed in the official programme. The event took place 4-7th May 2006 and brought together between 17,000 – 30,000 people from a multiplicity of different movements, organisations and countries.

This chapter, like the previous two, explores the publics, forms of publicness and modes of politics generated at different points of this initiative's enactment. As in the other case study chapters, I investigate three key features of this event: publicity, assembly and participant interaction. Before investigating these practices, this introduction provides a brief background to the Social Forum phenomenon.

According to Fisher and Ponniah (2003), the Social Forum 'movement of movements' represents "the most promising attempt to date to provide a space in which global civil-society groups can become better educated about one another, learn more about the processes of neo-liberal globalisation, plan collective actions, and develop alternatives to the current world order" (2003:4). The Forum concept was itself originally conceived as a 'social' alternative to the World Economic Forum, the gathering of businesspeople, politicians and others, held annually at Davos in Switzerland. Timed to coincide with the Davos Forum of the same year, the inaugural World Social Forum event was convened in Porto Alegre, Brazil in late January 2001. Since then, the Social Forum has proliferated with hundreds of thousands of people participating in different regional, national, thematic and local Social Forum meetings held in countries across South America, Europe, North America and, more recently, Africa and Asia with some of these events attracting over 150,000 participants (Glasius and Timms, 2006: 200).

The 4th European Social Forum event, held in Athens in May 2006, should be situated first and foremost alongside this set of ongoing Forum practices as pursued since 2001. However, in order to begin to engage with Social Forum practices and the Social Forum 'ethos', it is useful to turn to the Social Forum's Charter of Principles that is available online through many different Social Forum sites and used by Forum participants to frame and relate their activities (see for example www.forumsocialmundial.org).

Viewed as a piece of publicity material, this Charter of Principles document is unlike those I have analysed in the other case studies. It was produced by the Brazilian Organising Committee after they had organised the first World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001. As a participant in several different Social Forum events, I have observed this document being referred to and discussed in Social Forum meetings on a variety of occasions. In this sense the Charter, as Glasius and Timms (2006) have also observed, is very much a foundational document that has not only served to connect the hundreds of social forums that have been set-up globally since 2001 but also provided these initiatives with a set of shared purposes and methods (Glasius and Timms, 2006:194). The Charter is designed, its preamble states, “to guide the continued support of the [Social Forum] initiative” by providing 14 ‘Principles’ “to be respected by all those who wish to take part in the process” (WSF Charter of Principles, p.1).

The Charter invites Forum participants – actual or prospective – to commit to the project of generating an alternative form of “planetary society”; a society “directed towards fruitful relationships among Humankind and between it and the Earth”. While the document does not elaborate precisely what this alternative form of “planetary society” might be, it does set out a range of parameters designed to help facilitate its emergence (WSF Charter of Principles, p.1).

The Forum is constructed in article one as an “open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action”. Article two constitutes the Forum as a “permanent process”, not simply a process that is “localised in time and place”. While summoning up the ideal of openness and inclusivity, the Charter also apparently works to limit or bound this initiative by stating that it is for all those who

are “opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism” (article one). Article six outlines that the aim of the Forum is to “ensure that a process of globalisation in solidarity will prevail as a new stage in world history” and not to work as a representative or decision-making body.

The Charter of Principles document constitutes the Forum as a process that must be voluntary, self-organised and inclusive of a plurality of different civil-society groups. It also however commits participants to specific, albeit vaguely defined, objectives and ways of working. These commitments are reinforced by the way the Charter specifically outlaws the participation of the military political and representatives of political parties (article nine). This article works to construct the Forum in opposition to conventional hierarchical and state-centred forms of politics and apparently celebrates the fact that the Forum does not require participants to organise in ways that will work to homogenise or integrate their different positions, tactics or identities or to reach all-encompassing decisions.

The Forum, as this Charter constructs it, therefore neither privileges a particular social actor or movement or a particular type of organisation, nor does it require a centrally defined strategy. For these reasons, and as Boaventura de Sousa, a scholar of the Social Forum movement points out, the Forum – at least in theory – does not make political or cultural homogeneity the precondition for the formation of strong ties, unity or solidarity (2006:38). While de Sousa Santos asserts that the Forum constitutes a new form of politics, given the fragmentation of the left in recent decades, this approach to movement-building may also be understood in more pragmatic terms. That is, the Social Forum is a way of accommodating different fragments of global civil society that had not, prior to this initiative, found effective ways of cooperating either translocally, transnationally, transregionally or globally.

The most significant strands of civil society assembled by the Social Forum according to Glasius and Timms (2006) include:

- the strand of activism, associated since the beginning of the 1970s with anti-colonial struggles;
- the strands of practice associated with the diverse array of communist and socialist groups, from Trotskyists' to Guevarists' to social democrats;
- the strand of practice, usually referred to as the 'new social movements', specifically the women's movement, the peace and environmental movements;
- the strands of activity that all those NGOs dealing with human rights, environmental, gender and development with which NGOs have been involved for more than two decades;
- and, most significantly, that strand of activity generated by all those involved in the global social justice or anti-capitalist or anti-globalisation movements as they emerged in the 90s and early 2000s (2006:191).

In attempting to assemble these different strands into a 'movement of movements' the Social Forum initiative will be regarded here as a process working to summon up and construct a particular kind of transnational public. The 4th European Social Forum will, in this way, also be engaged with here as a loosely affiliated body of "self-authorised representatives" (Urbinati and Warren, 2008: 403) of an emerging public arising as a result of perceived systemic political failure at global and local levels.

5.1 Publicising the 4th European Social Forum

Drawing on extracts of the 4th European Social Forums website and the pages of this event's official programme, this section will identify and analyse the publics, forms of publicness and modes of politics summoned up through these materials. By doing this, the section highlights a basic tension inscribed into the way that the publics and the politics of this event are constituted. The tension is between the ways participants are constructed in these materials as being autonomous, heterogeneous and self-organising actors *and* the ways they are positioned as actors who together form a public collectivity committed to certain over-arching political projects, principles and aims. Allied to this, the Forum, as a mode of politics, is positioned as a technical, facilitative and therefore an open-ended and somewhat indeterminate venture *and* a means of developing these particular pre-constituted projects, principles and aims. Tracing how certain publics, forms of publicness and particular modes of politics were privileged over others at particular points, this section explores the diverse ways this event was promoted in its publicity.

"We have marched together against the G8, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in Prague, in Genoa, in Evian. We took part, all together, in the siege of the European Union Summits in Thessalonica, Nice, Seville, Brussels. We met during the huge antiwar rallies of the 15th February 2003, in the mass demonstrations against racism, in working class mobilisations defending pensions, public health and education, in rallies against the destruction of the environment, the 'anti' terrorist laws and repression. [...] We hope to see you all in Athens in May 2006, at the 4th European Social Forum." (Homepage of the 4th European Social Forum website, accessed February 2006).

The collective 'we' invoked here is a 'we' made by stringing together and thereby relating those who have 'marched', taken part, mobilised and been brought together by a particular set of protest events. It is a 'we' that privileges the role of certain

groups of activists and social movements and it is a 'we' that is related to a specific set of concerns and political projects. This collectivity, as it is assembled here, is against the G8, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank; it is anti the Iraq war, against racism, threats to public services, the destruction of the environment and 'repressive' anti-terrorist legislation. It is therefore a 'we' with a political position, or at least a set of political positions.

This 'we' is also translocal, transnational and global, engaging with and across international, regional, national and local levels. This 'we', invoked here, therefore represents resistance to certain established political institutions and the public policy trajectories and forms of political practice that they represent. But this 'we' is not simply a 'we' of resistance, it is a 'we' that constitutes itself as an alternative to these forms of politics. While existing in relation to pre-existing forms of politics, this 'we' also traverses and moves beyond the local or national politics and the limits of their institutional forms, operating not only against but also outside the realm of big 'P' politics.

As in Harrow Open Budget and Vote for Me, the focus here is on publics who are not being adequately addressed by conventional forms of politics. In contrast to the previous cases, however, the orientation here is towards a form of politics that claims to be working towards a different and more ambitious set of political aspirations. That is to say, participants in this process are committed to the possibility of a politics that is bottom-up and self-organised through the cooperation of diverse activists and movements, a politics that is conducted translocally and transnationally, and a politics geared to systemic transformation and the creation of 'another world'.

A particular historical narrative is also in evidence on this homepage. This narrative summons up an evolving and rapidly developing collectivity – a ‘we’ – and positions this group in the *vanguard* of a particular world-changing political process. The Forum process is positioned as a step beyond (and therefore also an advance on) conventional forms of politics and conventional articulations of publicness. The public in this piece of publicity is a public of activists working with an array of different pre-existing movements and organisations towards the development of an array of different projects. But it is also a public and a set of movements able to relate to one another and on occasions to unite despite their heterogeneity; and to unite either against certain political developments or to work towards other, more overarching, political aspirations.

For a further indication of how promotional material generated for this exercise envisaged these actors working together in these ways it is useful to turn from the website produced for this event, to the official 4th European Social Forum programme. Here I want to briefly to focus on how relations between the ideas of politics and public practice invoked on this initiatives homepage are constructed on the front cover of this programme document.



Figure 8: Main image used on the cover of the 4th European Social Forum Programme, May 2006

The front cover of the programme illustrated (above, figure 8) is dominated by a colour illustration depicting an image of the 4th European Social Forum in action, before it has actually taken place. The most prominent element on this cover is a hand-drawn illustration of an Athens tram full of protestors holding aloft different banners. The picture of this crowded tram is superimposed on an illustration of a world map, and the tram is situated in a way that literally shows it heading for Athens. The protestors on the tram are shown hauling one flag out of the window of the tram, above all the others that they have in their possession; it is a large rainbow-coloured flag, used in this context of Social Forum activities, to symbolise peace, cooperation and diversity. Two short phrases are superimposed on the cover of the programme, adjacent to this illustration. Above the tram are pasted the words

“the movements discuss and resist” and below them the words, “to change the world!” With the tram and its cargo of protestors positioned in this illustration, as if to show them both travelling between these two phrases, the protestors on the tram become depicted here as the actors who will enact and articulate these aspirations during this Social Forum event.

The idea that, out of a combination of different protest and social forum activities, an efficacious ‘movement of movements’ is emerging is repeated therefore on both this initiative’s homepage and on the front cover of its programme. The imperative to ‘resist’ is coupled here with the imperative to ‘discuss’, invoking the idea that to ‘change the world’ each of these kinds of activity will be necessary. Passengers on the tram heading for Athens carry different flags with them, but are also united under the banner of peace, diversity and cooperation. The possibility of ‘another world’ is contingent here both on the autonomy and on the diversity of the participants, and on their collective commitment to the Social Forum process and resistance to certain forms of globalisation. The 4th European Social Forum is itself presented here as a self-contained and temporary event but also as part of an ongoing form of political practice facilitated more broadly by the Forum process.

The way in which the homepage and front cover of the programme work to conjoin a certain set of political aspirations with a particular way of thinking about how politics needs to be approached and undertaken, is repeated once more in the introductory pages of the programme. In this text, the site of the event is described as a “social territory”, and prospective participants are advised that they will be required to identify with this kind of territory in particular ways:

“[I]nside the space we try to deny the demarcations between workers, volunteers and ‘users’, between organiser and visitor, between local[s] [...] and participants from abroad. Responsibility, tolerance and offering is [sic] required from all.”

“We are citizens – not customers [...] We wish that our common life for four days becomes a successful experiment – a model for future common projects.”

(Extract from the 4th European Social Forum programme, p.3)

A ‘we’ is once again constructed in each of these extracts. This time it is constructed by calling on prospective participants to temporarily suspend particular differences (or ‘demarcations’) that may be apparent between them by enacting the values of responsibility, tolerance and generosity during the event. In doing so, this publicity material suggests, participants will potentially be able to perform as citizens during this Forum event; to recognise that they are part of a ‘common life’; and to work on the emergence of ‘common projects’. This territory is, through these terms, cast as an experimental space in this material. And the hope is expressed here that by bounding-off this space and differentiating it from the space ‘outside’, this event could potentially become a successful model for future common projects.

While prospective participants are clearly promoted in this publicity material as the actors who will be responsible for this experiment, they are also actors who are at the same time being invited to conduct themselves in particular ways. These forms of conduct are presented in aspirational terms, offering prospective participants conceptual and imaginative resources that they might use to think through how the differences between them might be articulated and negotiated. However, it is important to recognise that these publicity materials are also constitutive in their own right, privileging certain publics, certain modes of politics and certain political projects over others. The heterogeneity of prospective participants and the different

political projects associated with them is celebrated in this material. But at the same time, these materials highlight various ways in which prospective participants might think of themselves as a 'we' or as a collective: be it by suspending certain sorts of difference temporarily during this event, or by seeking to work together, despite and through their differences, towards what are cast here as certain overarching shared aspirations.

In order to render prospective participants as autonomous *and* potentially productive within this process, participants are invited to recognise not only their differences but also to submit to certain ways of understanding themselves as a collective and to certain ways of understanding how each might facilitate the emergence of certain forms of collective action. In short, whilst recognising prospective participants as autonomous actors, this material also privileges a particular, if vaguely defined, set of political projects and a specific, if once again vaguely defined, 'public' code of conduct.

Prospective participants are cast here as being both already formed, aligned and organised, and as actors who are, potentially, open to further development, re-alignment and re-organisation through this event. Thus by promoting the event in this way, the 4th European Social Forum presents itself as a venture through which diverse actors might interact with, and relate to, each other in ways that will be useful and fulfilling both in their own right for particular activist organisations and for the actors themselves. Overall, these actors are all committed the development of a series of overarching political projects in one way or another. This is a form of politics that promises to be driven by participants themselves in a bottom-up way and also a form of politics that is, at least in part, conditional on the forms of assembly facilitated by this Forum event; a form of politics that stresses the necessity of specific and immediate forms of political participation and inter-personal

experience as well as the importance of ongoing and longer-term forms of instrumental work directed towards achieving a set of broader political aspirations.

It is important to note here that the 4th European Social Forum, despite being an event in its own right, should be viewed also as an event connected to a variety of other formal and less formal Social Forum practices. These include the formal work of the World Social Forum's 'International Council' (for a discussion of how the International Council operates, see, for example, Glasius, Kalodor and Anheier 2006), the work of the 4th European Social Forums Greek Organising Committee and the work conducted through the series of Preparatory Assemblies organised in the run-up to the Social Forum in Athens. Notable too is the range of other less formal pre-Forum activities such as email groups, discussion boards and websites that participants use to upload and download materials and to communicate with one another about matters pertaining to the Forum. Such channels enable delegates, representatives and prospective participants to influence and indeed to shape both the agenda and the organisational design of this Social Forum event and, in turn, the ongoing working of the Forum.

Such feedback processes have meant that since the first major Social Forum event in 2001 the Forum process itself has been subject to continual change, development and re-invention. However, having now traced some of the specific forms of publicness and modes of politics invoked in some of the key pieces of material used specifically to publicise the 4th European Social Forum, this account now explores the publics and forms of politics summoned up by the practices of assembly and participation that were observed while attending this event.

5.2 The 4th European Social Forum as an assembly

To identify and explore how publics were assembled and how different forms of politics were enacted during the 4th European Social Forum, this section will analyse some of the key techniques and technologies used during this event. The account will focus on how these techniques and technologies worked to assemble, elicit, facilitate, articulate and manage the two forms of publicness and politics highlighted in section 5.1. These ideas were first, the idea of a self-organising public; and, secondly, the idea of a public committed in advance of their participation to certain over-arching, if vaguely defined, political projects and aspirations. Connected to this, two modes of politics were also privileged in these materials: a mode that was cast as technical, facilitative and geared to enabling empowerment, and a mode of politics that was more instrumental and geared to delivering sets of pre-existing political projects and aspirations.

The 4th European Social Forum opened, ceremonially, in one of Athen's main city squares on the evening of Wednesday 3 May with large gatherings of Forum participants and a number of speeches and music performances. It returned to the Athens' streets three days later on the afternoon of Saturday 6 May for a large march and demonstration. However, its main activities took place on the site of the old Athens airport situated half-an-hour's tram ride from the centre of town. This site had been converted for use during the Athens Olympics and was later converted into a sprawling conference centre. Arriving at this site on the morning of 4 May to participate in this event, my first task was to join a large queue of people waiting to register. I was required to pay a 20 Euro (student rate) entrance fee and – having paid this and received a programme as well as an identity badge – I gained access through a gate in the tall wire fence that marked the perimeter of the main site.

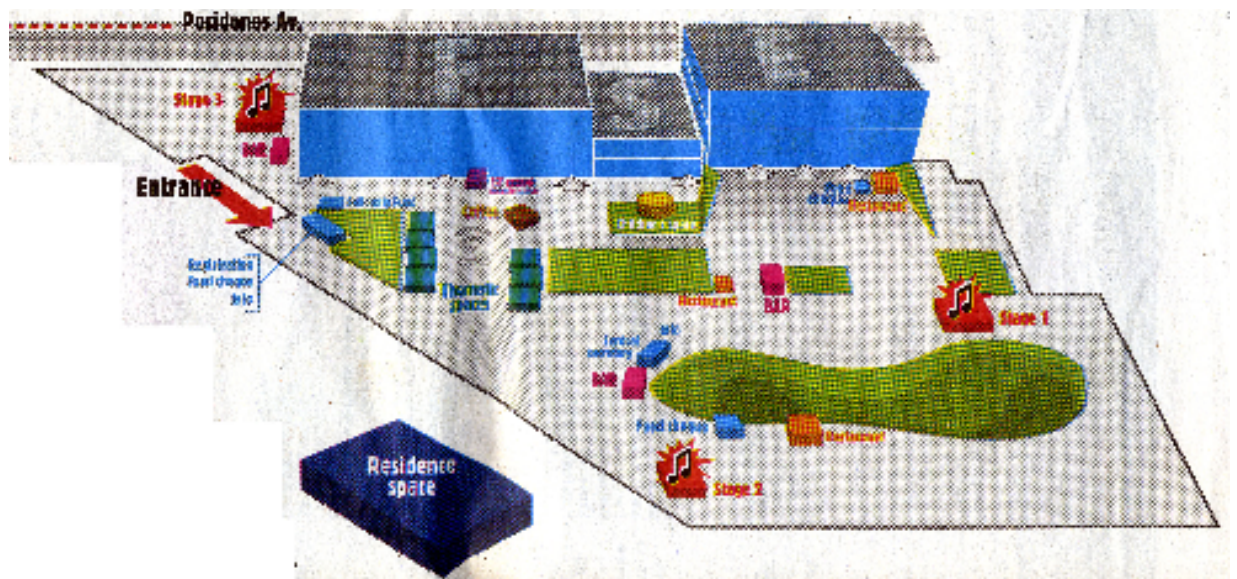


Figure 9: Map of main 4th European Social Forum site, May 2006

As illustrated in figure 9 (above) showing part of the map provided in the Forum's programme, the 4th European Social Forum took advantage not only of the meeting rooms available in the three main buildings (labelled 'F', 'S' and 'E' on the map shown in figure 6, spelling out the initials of 'Forum Social European') on this site but also the large areas of open-air space available around them. Outside, in the open-air, there were, amongst other amenities, a thematically-organised exhibition space, three large music stages, three restaurants, several open green spaces, a bar, a coffee stall, an information kiosk, a children's space and a residential space in which participants could make camp.



Figure 10: Main hall of conference centre, Athens, May 6, 2006

Inside the main building was a cavernous exhibition hall (see figure 10, above). This space contained a large café and an informal congregation area with tables and chairs in its centre. Surrounding this area, ranging across the rest of the floor-space in the hall, were several hundred stands used to publicise many of the participating organisations. Some sold political books or t-shirts; others handed out leaflets or showcased activist video material; some even sold 'Fairtrade' or Organically produced foodstuffs. Most of these stalls were elaborately decorated with banners, posters and other materials in order to attract maximum attention from passers by.

Using any one of three different exits from this hall, participants could access other areas of the main buildings. These additional spaces were used to either convene or help administer the large number of political meetings arranged over the course of this event. 67 different meeting rooms of varying shapes and sizes were available to participants. It would be within this set of spaces that the 278 scheduled seminars

and workshops, along with many of the 104 cultural events would take place, over the course of three days.

Because the official programme document ordered this exercise in particular ways, it too needs to be recognised alongside the map shown in figure 6 as a device that worked to organise and assemble this event and its participants. The three days of Forum meetings were divided in this programme into three sessions: a morning session (10am – 1pm), an afternoon session (2.30pm – 5.30pm) and an evening session (6pm – 9pm). Using this scheme, the programme set out a timetable scheduling when and where each of these 278 political meetings and many of the 104 cultural events would take place. This technology enabled between 34 and 44 meetings to be held in parallel during each of the three daily sessions. Using a tabular format, the programme presented the title of each of these activities in English and French, listing the main speakers, the organisations convening each of these activities, and the room where each activity would take place.



Figure 11: A seminar and a workshop, Athens, May 6, 2006

Alongside this array of formal political meetings, a range of ‘cultural events’ was also listed separately in the programme. These events included workshops for artists and

singers, film screenings, theatre workshops and performances, a programme of children's events, a number of exhibitions and an extensive programme of live music.

For the penultimate day of the Forum, Saturday 6 May (2006), just one session of political meetings was scheduled in the programme. This was because an "International Demonstration against neo-liberalism, war and racism" (4th European Social Forum Programme, p.61) was timetabled to take place on Saturday afternoon in the streets of central Athens.

Following a demonstration on Saturday afternoon, the concluding part of this Social Forum event was held the next morning back on the main site where a final event – an "assembly of social movements" (4th European Social Forum Programme, p.61) – was scheduled before the close of formal proceedings. All those participating in the main Social Forum event were invited to attend the assembly of social movements meeting, an outcome of which would be the formal Declaration of the Assembly of the Movements of the 4th European Social Forum – a document crafted through a collective process by those participating in this meeting.

Having drawn on observations and the official programme to provide a brief overview of how this event was formatted, I shall now draw on my own observations to describe how the workshops and seminars were set up and administered. The rooms in which each of the formal political meetings was convened had a set of tables and chairs at one end for the panel of speakers, a row of microphones and rows of chairs for participants who wished to attend the meeting. This layout was, in some ways, more formal and structured than the round tables designed to foster conversation at Harrow Open Budget. To one side, or at the back, of each of these rooms was a sealed-off, soundproofed booth housing a team of translators ready to

be deployed at each of the meetings. The organisers of each meeting were able to request the particular translation facilities they would need and, by drawing on volunteers organised by a network called 'Babels', appropriate translation personnel could attend each event. To provide translation facilities the organisers used a low-cost "alternative interpretation system" technology which they named ALIS developed by a group of Social Forum-aligned Greek technologists.

"In the 4th European Social Forum in Athens there are no official languages [...]. How better to begin making another world possible than by really understanding each other?" (Programme of the 4th European Social Forum, p.4)

Using these booths, sets of translators and the ALIS technology organisers were able to build a temporary broadcasting and recording system into the fabric of the different meeting rooms, enabling participants, if they wished and there was time, to contribute to proceedings in any of the languages that were catered for in that meeting. Volunteer translators could, via their headphones (see figure 12, below), then provide a near simultaneous translation into their personal microphone so that these translations could then be transmitted across each meeting room onto a dedicated FM frequency. To access these translations each registered participant was provided – for free – with a low-cost, pocket-sized FM radio and set of headphones. Babels provided translators who spoke 13 different languages, and most meetings were able to cater for at least Greek, English, French, German and Italian speakers with others providing for Russian, Romanian, Hungarian, Czech, Danish and Portuguese.



Figure 12: Translation facilities, Athens, May 6, 2006

Each meeting was scheduled to last a maximum of three hours and was formatted to give the pre-scheduled line-up of speakers an opportunity to address the meeting first. Other participants attending these meetings were then given the chance to comment, ask questions of their own and engage in discussion using the microphone provided. Typically, since there were usually between four and eight pre-scheduled speakers at each meeting, their presentations would last somewhere between half to three quarters of the time allocated, leaving the rest of the time for other participant contributions and for dialogue and deliberation between panel members and other attendees.

Having described some of the ways in which this Social Forum event was organised, I want to consider now how these forms of organisation worked to construct and assemble the two distinct forms of publicness and politics already highlighted in the previous two sections. These were first, an the idea of the public constituted as autonomous, heterogeneous and self-organising; and, secondly, an idea of the public as committed, in advance of acting collectively, to certain political projects and aspirations.

Particular ideas of publicness and politics were privileged through the spatial, temporal and translation practices already described. It was in the way this Forum event was assembled, however, that these different ideas were reconciled. To elaborate on this I want to reflect briefly on the set of spaces that were put in place for this exercise, the ways in which the programme worked to organise and orchestrate the event overall, and the way in which these different practices themselves privileged various kinds of translation practice.

As described earlier in this section, the site of the 4th European Social Forum was made up of mixtures of amenities. To this end, the layout of the site was designed to enable and facilitate different forms of public congregation, circulation and interaction. What is striking about this site's construction are the multifarious ways in which the site works to assemble participants both as a heterogeneous as well as a more unified group. On the scale of the site overall, the Forum rendered its diverse participants as a single group by grounding and bounding them within a single place and constructing this place as a place devoted to Forum activities. Once on the site, it was designed in a way that generated and thereby privileged a wide range of different ways of being different, together. The thousands of participants involved in

this exercise could take part in a variety of events occurring in parallel. This could mean, for example, meeting for a coffee, beer or a meal; viewing an exhibition; talking to or observing others while walking between different parts of the site; or attending a formal or informal political meeting; or attending a live music performance as part of a crowd. This space was constructed not only as a forum for political meetings, networking and planning but also as a festival for arts, music, social togetherness and the celebration of Forum culture itself. In these ways, the overall site was designed as a model of the Social Forum in action, a way in which a heterogeneous public could work collectively, thereby both performing and developing the set of political aims and aspirations around which this event had been constituted.

It is useful to analyse the role of the programme document in these terms, since it too can be understood as a tool for assembling and eliciting the publics of this Forum to work in particular ways. To recognise this, it is necessary to acknowledge how this programme orchestrated this Forum event, by setting out when and where the Forum's different activities would take place and who would be involved. The programme also constituted the Forum as a *sequence* of events with each one having a specific structure indicated in the programme: from the ways the Forum organised the four days overall, to the ways it organised formal activities and specified periods of 'free-time'. Through these means the programme set up an overall tempo for the event, and demonstrated how it would be possible to schedule such a wide range of different political meetings and activities as part of a single event while also modelling ways of organising and channelling heterogeneity.

The final forms of practice that I want to highlight in this section are the sets of translation practices. These practices comprised the technologies and personnel that enabled participants to converse during the political meetings without speaking

or understanding the same language. However, and just as significantly, designed in this way the site of this event more broadly came to be constituted as a site which had the potential to facilitate processes of European, transnational and translocal exchange, learning and action. Understood in this way, this setting, by facilitating an array of different activities – whether exhibitions, concerts, eating or walking – was itself set up to facilitate translation across difference. Here translation does not simply imply a technical process but is also valorised as a potentially creative, constructive and transformative act; or, in the words of one prominent scholar of the Social Forum: “translation is the procedure that allows for mutual intelligibility” (de Sousa Santos, 2006:132).

Translation as it is understood and invoked here is significant for scholars such as de Sousa Santos because the movements and NGOs that participate in the Social Forum process “constitute themselves around a number of more or less confined goals, create their own forms and styles of resistance, and specialise in certain kinds of practice and discourse that distinguish them from the others”. The identity of these movements “is thereby created on the basis of what separates them from the others” (2006:132). Processes and practices of translation are critically important therefore, because they have the potential to allow Forum participants to articulate their varying struggles and resistances and because they have at least the potential, to develop ever more comprehensive, consistent and collaboratively-generated alternatives (ibid.).

Translation practices are viewed here once again as a form of practice through which heterogeneous, self-organising and autonomous Forum participants can work together to advance an agreed set of political aspirations. While in one sense Forum politics, being a politics of translation, are cast here as voluntaristic politics contingent on the provision of certain kinds of infrastructure, these politics are also

constituted as forms of practice that have the potential to deliver alliances and solidarities, thereby consolidating the set of overarching collective political projects that have already been shown to be privileged in this setting.

5.3 Participant interaction in the setting of the 4th European Social Forum

Having previously considered, in the last section, some of the ways in this event valorised certain publics and forms of publicness as well as and briefly discussed how certain technologies were used to bring into being certain forms of politics, I would like here to discuss some of the ways in which participants were observed performing.

In particular, I want to consider some of the occasions during which I observed self-organised, voluntaristic participation and the practices through which participants translated, articulated and sometimes reconciled their differences. I want also to exemplify moments of fragmentation, atomisation and various other kinds of antagonism between participants and tensions in the ideas of public action that were invoked during these bouts of participation.

To analyse these different dynamics, I shall use this section to outline three sets of observations generated as a result of my participation in this event, and highlight a sample of the ways in which that the ideas of publicness shown to have been privileged in initiative's publicity materials and assembly practices were adopted, negotiated and resisted by some of those observed participating during this event.

One participant shared details of an incident that arose as a result of his affiliation with members of a regional Social Forum group. One of the contributions this group wanted to make to the 4th European Social Forum was an installation designed to showcase one of its recent initiatives. My conversations with this particular Social Forum participant were useful for this research process since they illustrated, in a personal as well as more technical way, some of the complex difficulties associated with the project of erasing hierarchical orderings of the public, and generating flattened – or ‘horizontal’ – spaces of inclusive politics.

In conversation my respondent described a formative experience he had had whilst participating in a Local Social Forum meeting. In the discussion about how participants wanted to contribute to the 4th European Social Forum in Athens, one of the long-standing participants in this group had suggested that a list of ideas generated at an earlier meeting needed further work. Because he had attended one of these earlier meetings and had liked the idea of being involved in the development of an exhibit for this Forum event, he volunteered himself for the job of working on some proposals for an exhibit to be showcased in an exhibition for the Athens event. This was one of the first opportunities he had taken to make an active contribution to the collective work of this group and, consequently, he had felt excited by the apparent flexibility of the group’s decision-making processes and its divisions of labour, and was enthusiastic about making a contribution.

When he emailed the results of his work to the group he was initially confused by what happened next. “Everyone ignored my proposals” he told me, and, “a furious argument started”. Instead of eliciting feedback on his ideas, his email sparked angry exchanges between a group of its long-standing members (members who had been absent from the meeting at which the young man had volunteered himself).

Initially, my respondent was under the impression that this 'other' group was angry because these proposals had been initiated and produced without their knowledge. But, as the exchanges developed, he realised that at the heart of this incident were pre-existing rivalries within the group. The person who had encouraged this newly-involved participant was accused of "empire building" by several other members. By cooperating with one member, my respondent had unwittingly found himself pitted against others in an altercation that he had not intended. To the 'other' group, his action had confirmed their suspicions about the particular member who had encouraged him to draft the proposals without their knowledge. He had, they later claimed, "pretensions to group leadership" and was "sexist". My respondent later discovered that the woman who was most vocal in her accusations in fact worked with this man, who was, in fact, her boss.

Being a relative newcomer, my respondent had been participating in the group diffidently, on the basis of his reading of the Social Forum's Charter of Principles, a Charter that grants all participants in Forum activities equal status. He had discovered however, albeit unintentionally, that the status and position of different participants in this Regional Social Forum were in fact highly contested issues. He had apparently adopted precisely the subject position he had believed was offered to him by the Social Forums Charter of Principles and having done so had found himself drawn unwittingly into a power struggle between different sets of long-standing members. As a result, his proposals were largely ignored and quickly forgotten. Being heard in this group, he had realised, did not simply depend on the merit of an idea or proposal; it also related to the way each member's history of involvement, position and status was understood by different members.

While he had initially experienced this group as exhibiting a capacity for flexibility and 'self-organisation', he had learnt that behind this apparent informality lay a set

of contested power relations and hierarchical structures. These forms of politics only became visible when they were challenged, albeit inadvertently, by this new participant. Despite being imagined as a space separated from the world 'outside'; relations of inequality 'outside' were, he found, sometimes reproduced, played out and struggled over 'inside' this space.

The second set of observations briefly recounted here developed as result of my attendance at a series of the 4th European Social Forum's formal meetings. I attended a seminar on day three of the Forum on the subject of Participatory Governance in European Cities, a workshop on day three on the topic of Participatory Budgeting and a meeting preparing for the Assembly of Social Movements also held on day three. Approximately 150 people attended the seminar, around 50 the workshop and approximately 200 the meeting. Participant observation revealed to me how different ideas of publicness and politics were articulated, contested and occasionally reconciled in these meetings. And, in particular, how each, while valorising self-organised, autonomous participation, also affirmed to me the need to *lead* processes of participation.

Forms of public and political leadership were inscribed into the facilitative practices used to convene and organise these meetings. Each seminar or workshop was organised around a topic, question or task that had been constituted in advance. Each meeting also privileged one set of speakers (those seated as 'the panel' or as 'lead facilitators') over others (those cast as attendees). I also witnessed more subtle forms of leadership being enacted when I engaged with and reflected on the issue of how participants might be able to most appropriately govern through participation. It is the third of these observations that I want to focus on here.

Amongst those scheduled to speak at the meetings on the topic of participatory governance and participatory budgeting were: the vice-mayor of Seville in Spain; a representative of Ruhr District tenants Forum in Germany; a councillor from the city of Thessaloniki in Greece; and an academic from a Dutch organisation called the Transnational Institute. In the context of this discussion on how publics are constituted through participation, particularly striking was the way the speakers recounted their involvement in experimental forms of participatory governance, each making a case for leading or regulating publics in particular ways.

The vice-mayor of Seville gave an account of how, while working within a leftist coalition of local politicians, she had helped develop and implement a form of participatory budgeting across her city. In its third year, this initiative involved local residents in decisions about how some 25 million Euros would be distributed amongst projects in their local municipality. She cast this scheme as a means of fighting “neo-liberalism, corruption and the possibility of Fascism” and of generating “socialism” in Seville.

The political agenda of the German delegate was less explicit. He recounted a story of his struggle in Berlin concerning the type of participatory budgeting technique that was to become established in one of the neighbourhoods in his city. This speaker explained how the Bertelsmann Foundation, a German think-tank with ‘neo-liberal’ leanings, campaigned for the implementation of a version of participatory budgeting that could be used in Germany to reduce and privatise public services on a voluntary basis. He told how, in one borough in Berlin, an alternative version of participatory budgeting had been set up that “reflected the spirit” of participatory budgeting as it had been developed in Porto Alegre. This version was taken up enthusiastically by local residents and was now used as a mechanism to distribute some 30 million Euros. Paradoxically one of the reasons he believed this

governance approach had been adopted so quickly by residents was not simply because it was more in line with the Porto Alegre approach, but instead because the concept of participatory budgeting had already been widely-publicised and legitimised by the Bertelsmann Foundation – a think-tank which apparently had the capacity to lead public opinion, and as a result, legitimise the implementation of this approach across Germany.

A councillor from Thessaloniki made the last of the presentations on participatory budgeting. One of his messages for those attending this meeting was not to “idealise” the potential contribution of the public prior to their involvement in these exercises. While this speaker recounted many experiences of involving local residents in their own governance which he regarded as being “positive”, he also recounted occasions when public participation in Thessaloniki had resulted in less progressive and more reactionary outcomes. He told attendees of how, on one occasion, a group of residents articulated resistance to a proposal for a new local tramway and subsequently went on to campaign against this development. On another occasion he described how public participation had led to a group of local residents developing resistance to their local left-wing governments pro-immigrant and pro-immigration policies.

Each of the three contributors highlighted here emphasised the importance of *leading* participatory approaches. While all three speakers stressed the inherent value of democracy and public participation, they each worked to make a case for the inherent value of socialist, or at least anti-neo-liberal projects. It was for this reason that each asserted the need to manage these practices in order to maximise the chances of their resulting in what could be regarded as a more progressive set of proposals, while minimising the chances of their resulting in outcomes that would, from a leftist perspective, be regarded as reactionary.

Once more, a tension arises between participatory public governance practices as a means of facilitating self-organised and indeterminate participation practices, and as a means of facilitating the development of pre-constituted political projects. The observations and subsequent analysis of these meetings showed how these speakers worked to reconcile these tensions by summoning-up publics that were at one and the same time autonomous and sovereign, *and* publics that also *needed* a structured and prescriptive framework for participation.

Particularly notable in the meetings were the ways in which many of the interventions made in the meetings focused on the development of support networks. Many participants did not focus on trying to 'solve' issues immediately or on particular problems linked to participatory approaches, such as those outlined by the main speakers, but instead focused on how alliances could be built between those already involved in these practices. One of the outcomes of these meetings was that different, and not always consistent, understandings of participatory governance were shared and areas of disagreement, as well as agreement, were identified. A further outcome was that commitments were made between participants to continue to maintain contact and to work together.

The tensions between different ways of understanding participatory subjects running through the presentations were in evidence again at another of the meetings I attended. This time my observations draw on those I made during a preparatory meeting for this Forum's Assembly of Social Movements that all those participating in 4th European Social Forum were invited to attend. The aim of this preparatory meeting was to begin to develop an agenda for the final meeting and to draft the final 'Declaration' of the event.

The preparatory meeting, held two days before the final meeting, was designed to offer any participants wanting to be involved in this process, the opportunity to contribute. While the 75 or so participants attending this meeting sat 'in the round' rather than as an audience facing a group of speakers, most notable were the ways the four members of the 4th European Social Forum 'Organising Committee' chairing this meeting attempted to assert their authority throughout. I had already heard rumours that some of the organisers of this Forum were trying to use this event as a means of unifying and leading the Forum in an as yet unspecified direction and through an as yet unascertained approach. Possibly as a result of such rumours, many of the exchanges that took place during the meeting seemed to me to be confrontational.

Members of the Organising Committee handing out copies of the draft Declaration, written in the lead-up to this meeting talked of the difficulties they had experienced identifying "moments of collective mobilisation" amongst the multiplicity of different movements taking part. They spoke of their desire to find an approach through which the Forum might be able to more clearly constitute its collective priorities and become more than simply a 'talking space'. "Without moving forward as a movement", one of them said, "we're impotent". Most of the participants agreed with this point. One, for example, called for a representative council to be elected to take forward this idea. Such suggestions, whether from members of the Organising Committee or from fellow participants, ignited fierce debate and even hostility amongst some of the other participants who were involved in these exchanges. Frequently during this meeting debates involved detailed discussions of Social Forum principles, at other points they entailed conversations about the practicalities of such proposals, while sometimes they led to bursts of shouting, clapping or booing.

These exchanges again provided an indication of the extent to which those participating in this event contested the characteristics of the Social Forum process. When it came to discussing the draft declaration there were more struggles over the issue of how the Forum should construct its identity to those 'outside'. Members of the Organising Committee asserted the need for a Declaration that was "short" and that presented a "common strategy". They expressed frustration at the demands of attendees for a long list of amendments and additions.

In response, attendees challenged the authority of members of the Organising Committee, stressing that they were not their "representatives" or "leaders" and that it was up to them to engage in dialogue with participants and generate a way forward that could satisfy, or at least be agreed upon, by everyone.

There were clashes during this meeting over the extent to which different movements should subsume their identity to the struggle against 'neo-liberalism'. Several participants were, for example, frustrated that there was no mention in the draft declaration of their struggles against the continued destruction of the environment, whilst others were aggravated by the fact that the Declaration did not specifically refer to their efforts at resisting imperialism. While the Declaration was subsequently adapted to address these concerns, it is nevertheless notable that 'neo-liberalism' is still deployed as the master struggle that in some way binds all of these movements together, thereby lending this 'movement of movements' an overall identity. The experience of attending this meeting provided me with more evidence of the ambiguity of this Forum process concerning ideas of hierarchies, divisions of labour and charges of vanguardism.

As a conclusion to this chapter, I want to recount briefly one final observation I made while in Athens. This concerns the last demonstration organised as part of this

event. This demonstration was significant because it took the form of a march through the streets of Athens and was therefore conducted outside of the confines of the 4th European Social Forum site. The demonstration was organised as part of this Social Forum event and was a means of assembling Social Forum participants and of organising and publicising the event in its own right giving the wider publics of Greece and Athens an opportunity to show their support for 'another world', their opposition to 'neo-liberalism' and the war in Iraq and the possibility of similar action against Iran. The estimates of those who attended this demonstration vary considerably, however, these estimates all indicate that many thousands more people congregated for this particular event than assembled for the main 4th European Social Forum assembly event that took place in the conference centre.

What is notable about this demonstration, however, is not its size but the way in which it again served to render the identity of the Forum as being ambiguous because, while this march was overwhelmingly peaceful, it was nevertheless marked by a series of sometimes-violent clashes between small groups of protestors and the large contingent of police drafted into central Athens to supervise the event. Significant here is that the Social Forum, in its overall Charter of Principles document, specifies that the Social Forum process should be 'non-violent'.

However, because some of those attending this event became involved in violent activities, the event came to be linked, at least in media reports, with this angry unrest. While it was possible to enrol participants who would abide by these principles of non-violence whilst inside the bounds of the Social Forum site, on this occasion, when the Forum moved outside of this site it was not possible to maintain this kind of control. Whatever the reason – some blamed the police, others blamed 'anarchist' groups who had actively boycotted the Forum because of its non-violent

stance – it demonstrates one further difficulty accompanying the process of constituting and managing the identity, membership and outcomes of such a public participation exercise as this one.

5.4 Publics and politics in the 4th European Social Forum

This chapter has already drawn attention to tensions between the ideas of publicness and politics invoked in the publicity, assembly design and forms of interaction enacted as part of this initiative. I have highlighted some of the moments and forms of practice through which antagonisms were reconciled, as well as some of the points at which these ideas and practices clashed and threatened the viability of particular activities. In this, the concluding section of this chapter, I want to explore further the ideas, dynamics and forms of practice I observed in this setting and to reflect on how this exercise, at this point, needs to be positioned in the public participation typology that was introduced in chapter 2.

In the process of exploring these practices, I have engaged with literature that is concerned with how it might be possible to account for, reflect and build on the emergence of the Social Forum. I have also studied the work of writers who have explored other social movement antecedents. Several of these authors have already been referred to over the course of this chapter. However, I want to start here by mentioning briefly two pieces of work not mentioned so far. These two pieces have been useful precisely because my own findings fail to ‘fit’ into the accounts of participatory politics that they present and because, for this reason, they have helped me to sharpen and shape my own analysis.

The first of these accounts is Hardt and Negri's (2004) account of the 'multitude', which has been strongly influenced by and, in turn been influential on, many of those active in the Social Forum movement. At the heart of its theory of political organisation is the claim that collective political action can and should arise through horizontal, flexible and non-hierarchical forms of political cooperation. "The multitude", according to Hardt and Negri, is a heterogeneous entity conceptualised as a congregation of singularities that "acts on the basis of what the singularities share in common" (2004:100). The multitude, then, is not controlled from above nor is it represented or spoken for by others.

Hardt and Negri implicate the Social Forum in their near-anarchistic critique of authority and in their celebration of what they regard as an intensely egalitarian approach to political participation. However, what I have found – by analysing the 4th European Social Forums publicity materials and assembly practices – is that a privileged status and therefore authority was given in this setting to certain ways of being a participant and certain ways of doing politics. I also found some indications of how – even under the ostensibly egalitarian regime put in place by the Forum – it remained possible for hierarchical relations of dominance and subordination to be reproduced through this form of participatory political practice. The assumptions that Hardt and Negri make about Social Forum practice are, therefore, called in to question or at least complicated by my empirical work.

The second of these accounts which has proved useful here – though again not wholly satisfactory – is that presented in a (1991) volume by Anne Phillips, called *Engendering Democracy*. Phillips devotes part of this volume to discussing and theorising experiences she had while involved with the women's movement in the

1970s. Phillips reflects on problems she observed when the political practitioners with whom she associated at that time refused to formalise their practices.

As I found in the 4th European Social Forum's publicity material and Phillips observed herself, in the settings of the women's groups with which she was involved, "no leaders or elites were acknowledged" (1991:126-7). This refusal to recognise leaders or elites resulted, Phillips claimed, in a situation in which "de facto leaders and elites went unchecked" (ibid.).

Through my engagement with the 4th European Social Forum, something slightly different emerged. As highlighted in section 5.3, self-appointed leaders and elites did not go unchecked because participants were afforded opportunities to challenge any such self-appointed authorities and the forms of domination they attempted to enact. Furthermore those participating in this exercise were also given opportunities to elaborate on, help develop or contest the ongoing political work of this initiative, and invited to involve themselves in the continual design and re-design of the facilitative regimes used to organise Forum events. So while hierarchical relations of dominance and subordination were not completely eradicated there were opportunities for participants to contest such inequalities and collaborate in the development of forms of practice that were aimed at mitigating them.

The space of the 4th European Social Forum was therefore neither a space that had rid itself of 'authority' nor a space in which elites or forms of leadership went unchecked. It was, rather, a space that constituted, privileged and enabled the performance of a set of somewhat more complicated and reflexive ways of being public and being political; this was a space of mediation, control and participative practice that neither wholly regulated nor wholly empowered participants. The 4th European Social Forum cast itself as a facilitative and enabling exercise while

deploying techniques that both afforded and worked to delimit and steer forms of public and political self-organisation. This exercise valorised notions of political egalitarianism and self-organisation while, at the same time, offering a privileged position and indeed a 'vanguard' status to the publics and forms of politics that were already directly linked to this venture and associated with struggles against 'neo-liberalism'.

Different and competing ideas and understandings of politics, publicness and participation were therefore all constitutive of this exercise. This meant, in practice, that the process of holding this exercise together became contingent on the success of a range of concepts, practices and ways of being that worked to mediate, manage and reconcile tensions between these often antagonistic ideas and understandings. The Charter of Principles document played an important role here, summoning up and appealing to a disenfranchised transnational public and the possibility of generating an egalitarian global democracy based on ideas of inclusion and belonging. At the same time, however, the Charter formally excluded from Forum activities those actors belonging to mainstream political parties or the military, and committed participants to non-violent forms of action. The Charter discouraged (at least implicitly) the involvement of actors not already committed to resisting the advance of 'neo-liberal' forms of globalisation. In this way, the document made the project of generating "fruitful relationships among Humankind" and the prospect of developing an alternative form of "planetary society" contingent on the adoption and performance of certain (albeit still quite vaguely defined) public identities.

The website and the programme each celebrated the diversity of the movement while also constituting participants as a 'we' – a unified or, at least, unifiable political force. This collective was united, according to this publicity, in its collective

resistance to 'neo-liberalism'. 'Neoliberalism' was positioned as the 'master-struggle' in this setting and used to bring into relation and to provide an explanatory rationale for a wide range of other political problems including war, deregulation of labour, poverty, environmental destruction, sexism and racism. The struggle against neo-liberalism worked in this way as the struggle around which a differentiated public of social movement activists were invited to assemble, associate and unite.

The idea of unity in diversity was also enacted through the assembly design used to organise this event. The design enabled thousands of participants drawn from a multiplicity of different movements and geographical locations to assemble and be together in one place while affording these participants opportunities to associate and work on different activities in parallel. By analysing this design I showed in section 5.2 how it worked to generate an experience and a performance of the social forum ethos and ideals. Key here was the way this design installed a range of (temporary) boundaries: first, between this event and the world 'outside'; and secondly, between different areas of the site itself. These boundaries allowed the multiplicity of activities and forms of association scheduled as part of this exercise to be differentiated from each another. They also allowed these activities and forms of association to be performed in proximity to each other as part of the same overall event, once again enacting through practice, the idea of unity in diversity.

The last of these ways in which tensions between unity and diversity were mediated and reconciled was through the concept and practice of 'translation', a concept deployed again and again in this setting with a great deal of hope invested in this idea. Translation was used here in a rather technical way to refer to the large numbers of translators and the investment this event made in technologies of simultaneous translation and was also used to refer to a particular approach to communicating across difference (an approach geared to generating mutual

intelligibility and opening-up possibilities for solidarity, co-operation and the formation of new networks).

I have shown in this chapter that translation, despite being organised in these ways, was not simply an enabling or facilitative process. Participants were required to submit to certain forms of regulation if they wanted to access translation facilities: they were expected, for example, to assemble and sit in a certain way and to conduct themselves according to a particular set of conventions (for example, to speak slowly and clearly; not to shout; and to address meetings one at a time). More importantly perhaps, the case study shows that opportunities to enact translation did not only result in co-operation or agreement (and temporary unity) but also opened-up possibilities for disagreement (and disunity).

Workshops and seminars had pre-constituted themes, agendas and headline-speakers and steered participative activities towards the production of certain 'results'. They also, however, invited participants to get involved and help elaborate the themes and issues under discussion. Given how participants were invited to reconcile the imperative to develop certain ongoing political projects with the imperative to self-organise, it is perhaps not surprising that these imperatives interrupted each other, with participants translating these demands in different ways and generating a multiplicity of different kinds of 'results'.

Politics and publicness, as they were constituted and enacted by the 4th European Social Forum were each therefore unstable and ambiguous. I have observed in this chapter how such ambiguity afforded forms of flexibility, creativity, interpersonal co-operation and dynamism while also resulting in moments of standoff, conflict and gridlock that were accompanied by intense feelings of frustration. Tensions between different ideas of politics and publicness were sometimes therefore productive in this

setting, although these tensions also constantly threatened the viability of the enterprise. The most glaring tension, for me at least, was between the way that the 4th European Social Forum cast its participants as legitimate representatives of a much larger, disenfranchised global public, while at the same time casting this form of politics and this body of actors as a 'vanguard'.

By positioning Social Forum actors as part of such a vanguard, those outside this group were cast as a set of actors with a need to be led. Viewed in this way, the egalitarian politics of the Social Forum is a two-tiered and hierarchically organised politics in which some are more equal than others. Social Forum publicity seeks to elide this form of critique by presenting itself as a form of politics that is self-evidently better than that facilitated by established 'neo-liberal' political institutions, and by casting itself as a process that will, on this basis, somehow *inevitably* grow as it recruits more and more people. This case study shows that constitution of this avowedly egalitarian undertaking is, however, currently underpinned by a rather hierarchical ordering of political knowledges and public participation practices.

Those I met at this event keenly felt the tension between an understanding of the 4th European Social Forum as an open and non-hierarchical space and an understanding of the Forum as a vehicle for particular kinds of political transformation. Many of the participants I met and observed engaged with this tension reflexively, resulting in forms of co-operation and compromise. However, this tension, coupled with the inequalities of status between participants also frequently threatened to erupt and also sometimes produced distrust. Event facilitators, given their role as organisers, were just as likely to be cast by participants as would-be leaders and treated with suspicion because they were to be treated as 'enablers' of self-organisation. It was incumbent on them, as it was on participants, to negotiate these roles and the imperatives inscribed in each. To hold

these processes together therefore not only required a great deal of time, effort and patience on the part of all participants; but also required a great deal of skill, commitment and possibly even faith. The fragility of this enterprise is alluded to in the programme of the 4th European Social Forum when it announces that this initiative is ‘an experiment’ – as much of work in progress as a serious political intervention. The programme also expresses the hope (rather than the conviction) that this enterprise may “*become* a model for future common projects” (italics added). Understood in these terms, the programme and the assembly design each works to summon up and bring into being a particular way of being (a mode of public comportment and a space of politics) that pre-figure this future.

In these ways the 4th European Social Forum worked to position itself as part of a wider and longer-term process aimed at transforming and moving beyond actually existing forms of institutional politics. What the evidence presented in this chapter suggests, however, is that far from overcoming many of the problems that were associated with actually existing politics (hierarchical structures, vanguardism, exclusion, non-participation, inefficiency, regulation) this initiative – as it was enacted in practice – was faced with many of these same problems.

I want to conclude here by briefly reflecting on what the material presented in this chapter might imply for the way in which this initiative was positioned in the public participation typology developed in chapter 2.

		O R I E N T A T I O N		
		Deliberation	Pleasure	Transformation
D O M A I N	Governmental			
	Popular media			
	Social movement			4 th European Social Forum

Table 7: The 4th European Social Forum in the public participation typology

As shown in table 6 (above) the 4th European Social Forum was originally positioned in the typology as a social movement initiative, one that privileged a *transformation*-oriented approach to public participation. Having had the opportunity to explore this case in more detail, I have found evidence that supports, and also evidence that problematises, this original positioning. I have presented evidence that supports the idea that the 4th European Social Forum was a social movement venture that aspired to – and worked to pre-figure – a form of transnational (and translocal) politics based on principles and modes of practice *different* from those privileged by the more established institutions of global governance.

Being different here not only meant aspiring to different political aims, but also meant performing differently and that meant developing novel forms of participative practice. As I have indicated in this chapter a range of different kinds of activities were laid-on as part of the overall 4th European Social Forum experience. Some were more formal, *deliberative* and instrumental (the programme of workshops and seminars) while others were much more informal and geared, at least in part, to

delivering forms of *pleasure* and enjoyment (the programme of cultural events and informal spaces of congregation and display).

What has also become apparent through this chapter is that many aspects of the Social Forum ethos constitute themselves reflexively, and on an ongoing basis in relation to certain understandings of pre-existing politics. So while setting themselves up as an alternative, as being different and separate from these pre-existing forms and ideas, Social Forum practices also exist in a close – if oppositional – relationship with these forms and ideas. Indeed this strategy is vital if the Social Forum is to present itself as a viable alternative – it must at one and the same time seek to undermine the political credibility of these forms while promoting itself as an advance and a move beyond these forms. One of the reasons why the so-called ‘battle for Seattle’ in 1999 was such an important moment in the imagination of the Social Forum was because this was the moment when the ‘anti-globalisation’ movement first made an impact on the world’s media. Viewed in this way, the activities of the Social Forum have since been about occupying the domain of the popular media and re-inventing the domain of the governmental, as much as they have been about forging ‘new’ ways of allowing diverse social movements to work together.

The separations and boundaries suggested by the typology are again complicated by this empirical work. Separations, boundaries and differences between these orientations and domains were not eradicated by this case; instead these ‘types’ of practice were drawn on, used and re-constituted in ways that were specific to this setting and this process. Different ideas of politics and publicness that are implied by these ‘distinct’ orientations were articulated with one another in ways and with effects that were particular to this case. The next chapter will begin the process of

comparing the processes of articulation evident within and across the three different case studies.

Chapter 6

Paradoxical publics

“A public seems to be self-organised by discourse but in fact requires pre-existing forms and channels of circulation. It appears to be open to indefinite strangers but in fact selects participants in terms of shared social space (though not necessarily territorial space), habitus, topical concerns, intergeneric references and circulating intelligible forms (including idiolects and speech genres)” (Michael Warner, 2002:106)

This chapter engages with the connections set in play once the three case studies (chapters 3-5) are brought into relation with one another and compared. Both this chapter (chapter 6) and the next (chapter 7) engage with issues of *constitution*, *enactment*, *mediation* and *translation* – chapter 6 compares and analyses the contradictory discourses of the public constituted through the publicity materials, processes of assembly and participant interactions analysed in each case study chapter. As such, this chapter addresses the first of my research objectives: **to investigate how diverse forms of publicness are being brought into relation with one another via contemporary public participation practices.**

Chapter 7 continues comparing some of the modes of politics inscribed into and enacted through the material, technological and organisational practices through which these exercises were assembled and performed, and addresses the second of my research objectives, that is, to examine the modes of politics inscribed into the three cases. The distinction I invoke in this research between publicness and politics relates to distinctions I have been able to trace between how these ideas are constituted and performed in each of the three settings. This distinction has also aided the process of analysing, ordering and elucidating my research findings. As

each of these comparative chapters will show, these ideas, in practice, are more often than not entangled in complicated and unyielding ways.

I begin this chapter by arguing that the literatures with which I engaged in chapter 1 cannot adequately account for the practices documented in the three case study chapters. Having set out some of the limitations of this literature, I then re-engage with the three cases and open up space for alternative ways of accounting for how these initiatives were performed. This new phase of analytical work is spurred on by the opportunity to compare the cases and explore connections and possible relationships between them (an opportunity opened up by the way this research process has been designed). This offers the possibility of generating new insights into the forms of publicness and politics enacted in my case study sites.

The findings and preliminary attempts to theorise them are presented in four steps:

- Section 6.1 reflects on the literature reviewed in chapter 1 and the typology generated from this review, examining each in the context of my findings.
- Section 6.2 introduces the concept of *paradoxical publicness*, and shows how this has been generated as a way of naming the relationships between the discourses of the public that run through each initiative.
- Section 6.3 then works to locate and elaborate on this concept by drawing on and engaging with contemporary scholarship on publicness and politics.
- The aim of section 6.4 is to explore how images of the public were translated and performed in each of the three cases studied.

The tension arising during this phase of analytical work has been that of highlighting and conceptualising similarities, while remaining attentive to the differences between the three cases. These differences reflect, in large part, the varying

domains and orientations highlighted in chapter 2 and presented in table 3. When comparing the three case studies, however, I have focused on surfacing what appear to be deeper structural similarities in the constitution of publics. The analysis that follows seeks to bring to the fore similarities that have been identified between the cases while *also* demarcating some of the different ways in which these similarities were expressed in each of the three settings. Before describing and discussing some of these, however, I want to revisit the literature reviewed in chapter 1 and the typology developed in response to this literature in chapter 2.

6.1 Revisiting literature and the typology of public participation practice

The key limitation of the three literatures with which I engaged in chapter 1 is that, either alone or together, the literatures do not adequately account for the diversity and combinations of practices and ideas of the public that were performed during the exercises documented in chapters 3-5.

This finding is based on the investigation of my sample of three cases. These cases were selected (as was described in detail in chapter 2) on the basis that there were some initial indications that each privileged one or other of the three orientations towards public participation identified and discussed in chapter 1. What I have found through my comparative work, however, is that there is no straightforward correlation between the publics constituted and performed in each of the exercises and any one of the orientations towards public participation practice that are

privileged in the three literatures. The evidence would seem to indicate that each of the three orientations and associated forms of practice were expressed in *all* three cases.

The connections that were formalised in chapter 2 between particular cases and particular orientations (see typology of public participation reproduced below as table 7) have not therefore adequately borne the test of further empirical investigation; at least not in the straightforward form that these connections were initially made using this device.

		O R I E N T A T I O N		
		Deliberation	Pleasure	Transformation
D O M A I N	Governmental	Harrow Open Budget		
	Popular media		Vote for Me	
	Social movement			4 th European Social Forum

Table 8: Typology of public participation.

As should be clear by now, one major limitation of the literature reviewed in chapter 1, is that it works to keep different orientations, ideas, ideals and domains of public participation separate. The typology (see table 7 above) of public participation was developed to formalise assumptions about such separations and to help to test them. The selection of the three cases was intended to explore and assess,

empirically, the utility of the demarcations between different orientations towards public participation traced in this literature. I found in my research that each case did enact, and indeed did sometimes privilege, the particular orientation with which it was associated in the typology. However, my research has found that each case also enacted versions of each of the other two orientations. Crucially, however, these three orientations were inflected and enacted differently in each of the three settings.

A version of public participation, strongly associated with the ideas and ideals of **deliberation** is associated in the typology with the case of Harrow Open Budget. As shown in chapter 3, the series of 30-minute bouts of deliberative discussion were given a central role in the schedule of this participative assembly and were used as a means of engaging participants with the Council's policy concerns. But bouts of systematic – if usually truncated – deliberation were also part of the staging of Vote for Me. In the case of the 4th European Social Forum, deliberation was the core feature of the multiplicity of workshops and seminars. Here each workshop or seminar lasted up to three hours, with up to three of these programmed for each of the four days of the Forum. A striking difference was the time given over to deliberation at each event, although differences also existed between the ways in which deliberation was shaped, facilitated, enacted and managed during the three different assemblies.

Vote for Me demonstrated a form of public participation geared to the delivery of **pleasure**, enjoyment, entertainment and excitement. Ample evidence for this orientation towards public participation was documented in chapter 4. Opportunities for pleasurable, enjoyable, entertaining or exciting public participation were also, however, offered in the setting of Harrow Open Budget. Participants were invited to

socialise with one another, to enjoy the excitement of participating in 10-second bouts of voting for which the main lights were dimmed and loud excerpts of pop music were played; and were offered the chance to take part in a 'fun' 'trivia quiz' at the end of this event. Again, pleasure, enjoyment, entertainment and excitement were all on offer as part of the 4th European Social Forum. Invitations to take part in these modes of performance were extended through the extensive programme of 'cultural activities' (pop concerts, dance, drama and art activities) programmed into this event.

Finally, the typology associates the case of the 4th European Social Forum with modes of public participation that privilege forms of social and political **transformation**. Chapter 5 showed how transformation in this setting was associated with promoting and enacting resistance (and the generation of alternatives) to what was cast as extant 'neo-liberal' transnational and/or translocal governance processes, practices and relations. While inflected and performed very differently, offers of social transformation were also in evidence in the setting of Harrow Open Budget, which aimed to transform relations between a local public and its council, as well as the culture of the Council itself. In the setting of Vote for Me ideas of transformation were inflected in yet another way, by implying a transformation of relations between a national public and its representatives in Parliament, and a transformation of a 'disenfranchised' public.

We can also see some blurring of the distinctions between different domains distinguished in the typology. Each of the case studies related, in some way, to government institutions and practices. Each deployed popular media techniques to help publicise both the initiative itself and the political project that it sought to promulgate. And each had to engage with the possibilities and difficulties associated

with social movement activism. While the 4th European Social Forum deliberately welcomed social movements, the other case studies attempted to foreclose the possibility of the influence of such social movements – in the case of Harrow Open Budget by selecting a ‘random sample’ of the local population and in Vote for Me by explicitly excluding those with any pre-existing allegiance to one of the established political parties.

This and other evidence documented in the case studies suggests that relationships between the domains, orientations and cases brought to the fore in the typology, are less straightforward and rather *more complicated* in practice, than the normative frameworks offered in the literatures reviewed in chapter 1. This is a significant finding in itself, in that it challenges the assumptions mobilised in these literatures. However, important questions rise to the surface at this point. If the boundaries between these domains and orientations are less clear in practice than they are in these literatures, what precisely were the relationships between these forms of public participation practice? And, if these domains and orientations are being related to or overlaid with one another, what might be some of the implications?

To address such questions more work needs to be undertaken to bring the literatures reviewed in chapter 1 into relation and into conversation with one another. This means working across the three orientations rather than pre-supposing that they pertain to separate fields, domains or settings of practice. Any such approach would also need to work hard to build these relations without collapsing differences between these literatures and the distinct normative orientations towards public participation that they each privilege.

In attempting to make the case here for a longer-term project of this kind, I want to begin to generate an alternative way of accounting for the findings of this research. I will not be rejecting the idea that the three literatures reviewed in chapter 1 can provide a useful set of resources for the analysis of some of the forms of practice documented in the case studies. Indeed they have already been used as the basis for much of my analysis, not least by helping to generate the research questions set out at the end of Chapter 2. The aim here is rather to begin to find ways of accounting for the co-presence and connections between these different orientations in the case studies and therefore to build a stronger case for bringing these literatures and traditions of thinking about public participation into a closer relationship with one another.

I want to suggest that the most useful starting point for any such alternative explanation, or set of explanations, is neither the three literatures nor the typology but the case studies themselves. For this reason I decided to return to this material to review and analyse it comparatively. The comparative analysis undertaken in this chapter moves this account beyond the findings that each initiative expresses each of the three orientations towards public participation by identifying additional, and as yet unexplored, relationships between the cases. The findings elicited through this process provide this research with a novel explanation for the co-presence of the various orientations towards public participation in each case. Before introducing these findings, in the next section it is necessary to develop one further point regarding the role played in this research process by the literatures reviewed in chapter 1, and the typology generated in response to them.

Despite the limitations already noted it is important to acknowledge the contribution that the literatures reviewed in chapter 1 have already made to this research.

Without them it is unlikely that many of the features of the initiatives, highlighted in the case study chapters, would have been given the attention that they were. For example, if I had simply been looking for, or assuming that, practices which expressed a deliberative orientation towards public participation were consequential or relevant to my investigation of the Harrow Open Budget, it would have been unlikely that I paid so much attention towards the practices indicating that an orientation towards the delivery of public pleasure were also at work in this setting; or, in the case of Vote for Me and the 4th European Social Forum, have given as much attention as I did to the presence of practices which expressed a deliberative orientation. The typology developed in chapter 2 brings a particular set of research objects (domains and orientations) into relation, and by doing so, it has fostered a research process which has begun to think across (and outside) well-established disciplinary and practitioner boundaries. I would like to show that the results of this work have the potential to open-up new academic and practitioner agendas. While this work is still in its early stages, I will begin to sketch-out my ideas for these agendas in chapters 7 and 8. Here, however, I shall begin this process by developing the concept of 'paradoxical publics'.

6.2 Paradoxical publics

This section introduces and analyses the finding upon which the remainder of this chapter builds, this is the finding that **the publics summoned up by publicity material in each setting were *paradoxical publics*.**

This insight has been generated through a comparative analysis of the three case studies. Many differences presented themselves for this analysis: these included differences between the aims of each exercise; differences between the nature of the political intervention that each initiative proposed to make; differences between amounts of time given to each exercise; differences between the number of participants that might be involved in each event.

While these and other differences between the cases are immediately apparent, rather less obvious is a set of similarities. In the remainder of the chapter I shall attempt to move back and forth between an assessment of these similarities and a scrutiny of differences. Initially, I shall highlight similarities between two discourses of the public in each of the initiatives: a discourse of *public change* and a discourse of *public continuity*. Drawing on evidence from the three cases I to describe each of these discourses in turn, and then consider how these discourses are articulated in each setting.

Discourse 1: public change

“Isn’t it time you had a say over how and where this money is spent?”

(Homepage of the Harrow Open Budget, accessed October 2005)

“Have you got what it takes to be an MP?”

(Vote for Me press release, 14 April 2004, p.1)

“Today we are more confident than ever that another world is possible”

(Homepage of the 4th European Social Forum website, accessed May 2006)

The most prominent discourse running through all the publicity of the three initiatives was a discourse of *public change*, evidenced by the significant number of statements in each set of publicity materials offering prospective participants the opportunity to: *take on political elites, move beyond traditional modes of political organisation and engage in bottom-up or self-organised forms of political action*. Change, as it was constituted in these initiatives' publicity, implied moving from conventional and outdated political practices to new and more participatory and, therefore more public-centred forms of politics.

Narratives of crisis and renewal were fundamental components of each of these discourses of public change. In each set of publicity material the crisis, or set of political problems that these initiatives would address, was different. In the case of Harrow Open Budget the political crisis was local, being linked to the grievances of a local public and a break-down in its trust of the local Council.

In Vote for Me's publicity, the crisis was national, caused by a public-feeling of disconnection from Parliamentary politics, MPs and the major political parties. In the case of the 4th European Social Forum, the crisis was transnational or translocal and political problems were related to a crisis in public confidence in conventional forms of political leadership and dominant, 'neo-liberal' regimes of governance as they are enacted across different local, national and global scales.

While differently nuanced, these discourses were all discourses of institutional crisis. Publicity materials presented stories of governance practices de-coupled or wrenched from public control. Hopes of renewal were aligned, in each case, with the

possibility of more *self-organised* and direct forms of political action. Crisis and renewal stories worked in each case to signal that public participation exercises would offer an open, self-organised and direct forms of politics: politics that would somehow be more accessible to greater numbers of people; more open to a greater variety of public ideas and forms of public conduct; and a politics that was more directly controlled by, and engaging and accountable to, the publics invoked.

In the Harrow Open Budget, participants were offered a role in shaping budgetary and policy decision making; in the case of Vote for Me the publicity gave participants an opportunity to select a new Parliamentary candidate; and in the case of the 4th European Social Forum, participants were invited to organise forms of action related to 'globalisation'. In each case the publicity materials implied that participants would have opportunities to perform in ways usually precluded by more established forms of politics, based on political parties and representative democracy. While such opportunities would engage participants in formal discussions and decision-making activities, the tone of these publicity materials suggested that these exercises would also embrace more informal modes of public participation.

In each set of publicity materials the publics constituted by these discourses of public change were cast as the political guardians and even the leaders of these exercises. Publics of change were, in each case, active (rather than passive); assertive (rather than deferent); independent (rather than dependent); and capable (rather than incapable) publics. These publics were offered political processes that, according to these discourses of change, would be determined by the publics themselves (rather than by others). Implicitly these public participation exercises would also therefore be characterised by their *open-endedness* and *indeterminacy*, as well as by their relative *informality*.

Discourse 2: public continuity

“The Assembly occurs at a key stage in the strategy and budget setting process of Harrow council. In August and September Directorates start to draft what are called ‘High Level Service Plans’. These lay out the broad options and priorities for the coming years. [Harrow council] have agreed to use the results of the Harrow Open Budget process in *their* budgetary decision-making process” (‘What’s up for discussion’ section of the Harrow Open Budget website, accessed October 2005)

“ITV commissioned Vote for Me at a time of widespread concern that many people [...] feel apathetic towards political parties and that politics is irrelevant. [...] Following the election, the challenge was issued to broadcasters to engage more people in the democratic process.”
(Vote for Me press release, 14 April 2004, p.1)

“We have marched together against the G8, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in Prague, in Genoa, in Evian [...] We hope to see you all in Athens in May 2006, at the 4th European Social Forum” (Homepage of the 4th European Social Forum, accessed February 2006)

The second discourse running through the publicity material of the three initiatives is a discourse of *public continuity*. This discourse worked in each case to relate the exercises to particular pre-existing organisations and to a range of projects that were ongoing. Discourses of public continuity worked to affirm the value, the authority and also the legitimacy of these different organisations and projects and highlighted the importance of their role in, and their continued relevance to, various kinds of pre-existing politics.

In the case of Harrow Open Budget, discourses of continuity were evident in the affirmation of the value of this local Council, its Councillors and Council officers. This discourse also worked to affirm the importance of the Council's established public policy trajectories and its pre-existing budget-setting procedures. The decision to name and promote this initiative as 'Harrow Open Budget' implied, furthermore, that there would be some kind of continuity between this event and those forms of 'participatory budgeting' that had preceded this particular manifestation of this approach. These are different continuities that, of course, stood in tension with each other.

In the case of Vote for Me, discourses of continuity also appeared in a range of different ways. While critical of Parliament, the House of Commons and MP's, Vote for Me's publicity nevertheless stressed the underlying importance of these institutions and their salience to this initiative.

The publicity emphasised how the purpose of Vote for Me was to re-popularise these forms of politics by (re)presenting them in ways that would make them more engaging and *real*. Continuity was implied in the selection and promotion of a television format that was already likely to be familiar to viewers: that of reality television. Naming this initiative Vote for Me, might even be seen as a strategy expressing yet another form of continuity, since this name was 'borrowed' from a similar venture undertaken a year earlier by an Australian broadcasting network.

In the case of the 4th European Social Forum, continuity with the 1st, 2nd and 3rd European Social Forum events is suggested in two ways: first, in the idea that the set of organisations and actors involved in earlier social forum mobilisations would

be similar to those involved in this exercise; and second, that the political aims and organisational aspirations of this event would build on those of earlier social forum actions.

In each case, discourses of continuity – despite being connected to different pre-existing public organisations and projects – worked to promote the idea that the three initiatives were related to, and some kind of continuation of, pre-existing forms and objects of practice. In this way discourses of continuity offered prospective participants the opportunity to be involved in political and cultural experiences that would be familiar to them. However, despite each of these publicity discourses offering forms of continuity, those forms of continuity offered were different in each case, thus advocating and working to legitimise the particular (and different) forms of participatory practice that were adopted in each setting.

These discourses of public continuity summon up particular ideas of the public. These publics are assumed here to be entities that wish to invest time and effort in the development of pre-existing political organisations and public projects, and to have an understanding, in advance of their participation, of the aims and performative conventions – or norms – associated with particular participation exercises. The publics addressed by these discourses of continuity did not need, therefore, to be in control of every aspect of the mediation, organisation and management of these exercises. Because these publics were presumed to understand and be sympathetic to the conventions – or norms – through which pre-existing organisations and projects operate, it was also assumed that they would be willing to trust and defer to others. The public of this discourse is not therefore necessarily averse to more traditional ‘top-down’ or hierarchically organised regimes of political action. Because the aspiration of the publics constituted by these

discourses of continuity is to develop certain already existing forms of public solidarity and belonging with pre-existing political organisations in order to contribute to the realisation of different ongoing public projects.

Articulating discourses of change and continuity

For the purposes of the analysis presented above, these discourses of change and continuity have been disentangled to bring to the fore a certain set of distinctions and tensions between them. It is important to recognise, however, that in the publicity material different tactics were used to interweave, bind together and even fuse these two discourses. For example:

- *Through the naming of the exercises.* The name 'Harrow Open Budget' suggests continuities in the implied relationship with the local authority and its budget-setting process. But the status given to the word 'Open' in the title and logo suggests an interruption to business as usual and the inauguration of something new. This initiative comes to be positioned, then, as an enterprise that will enact an ongoing, pre-existing form of governance in a novel, more open and participatory way. The title Vote for Me brings together two words from different lexicons: one continuous with the practices of parliamentary democracy ('vote'), and one evoking a rupture of those practices by naming 'Me' as an authentic, individuated subject in place of the representative subjects associated with traditional democratic practice. The naming of the 4th European Social Forum signifies continuities with other forms of social movement activism, while its title also signals a deliberate distancing from the World Economic Forum and a rupture with the conventions associated with transnational institutions (the

International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Economic Forum were all objects of opprobrium in the 4th European Social Forum's publicity materials).

- *By adapting pre-existing practices.* In Harrow Open Budget, the practice of setting policy and budgetary options was unchanged. However, deliberation of those options was moved (at least temporarily) from the town-hall offices and Council chamber to the main sports hall of Harrow's municipal leisure centre where members of the 'ordinary' public were involved. Elected officials retained responsibility – and accountability - for the process, but there were modifications to the channels through which these responsibilities were managed. In Vote for Me the aim was to identify a prospective parliamentary candidate who would then be in a position to stand in the next General Election, thereby contributing to continuity of the UK's pre-existing political system. However, as in Harrow's Open Budget, it was to execute this in a new way (and thereby facilitate change) by excluding candidates who were already members of established political parties, and by using the form of a reality TV talent contest which would allow viewers at home to 'elect' the winner of this competition. In the 4th European Social Forum, while existing social movements were enabled to pursue and extend their existing projects, there was also an emphasis on transcending prior commitments and allegiances so that new platforms for political action could be built. By stressing that this forum would be social and cultural, it presented itself as a kind of *interference* with more established political organisations and more conventional political gatherings and sets of actors.
- *By foregrounding the role of 'new' public actors.* In Harrow Open Budget these were cast as 'ordinary' members of the public, representative of defined demographic groups, rather than of particular political parties or interests. In

Vote for Me the desired public was that of a disenfranchised generation. And in the 4th European Social Forum the focus was on actors who were already mobilised in some way, but who were being mobilised anew to overcome the fragmentation associated with multiple forms of public action and diverse public identities. In each case, however, more traditional, established or experienced publics were needed to mediate events in order to connect these new publics to a wider polity.

The above examples illustrate how, in practice, discourses of change and continuity were articulated with each other rather than enunciated separately. By drawing attention to differences between these two discourses it is possible to highlight how each mobilises a different and *competing* set of public norms, public capacities, characteristics, needs, desires and modes of performance. At first sight, this makes these discourses appear contradictory and *mutually exclusive* but, as I have already begun to demonstrate, in each of these settings, these discourses were *both* constitutive. This has implications for how the publics that were summoned up by them might be understood.

The claim I am making here is that the publics who were summoned up in the case study sites were *paradoxical publics*. These are publics oriented towards certain kinds of change *and* certain kinds of continuity; they have a desire to self-organise *and* a desire for the familiarity and membership of a familiar and pre-existing group; a capacity to manage indeterminacy *and* an aspiration to develop pre-existing and ongoing public projects; a capacity to participate in bottom-up *and* top-down forms of organisation; and the capability to lead *and* the capability to be led.

The paradoxical qualities of these publics were constructed by bringing into relation competing ideas about what it means to perform publicly. Because of differences between the discourses of public change and public continuity, a certain set of tensions came to be inscribed into the ideas of publicness that were promoted in each case study. These tensions, captured in the notion of paradoxical publicness, mean that publics summoned up are, at least discursively, *unstable*. The idea of participation also comes to be constituted in a particular way as a result of the co-existence of discourses of change and continuity, with participation being cast as a process that would somehow need to mediate, manage, negotiate and articulate these different ways of understanding and performing publicness.

The recognition and acknowledgement of the paradoxical qualities of the publics summoned up by these publicity materials was a significant moment in this research process. It demonstrated to me that there was an important area of *similarity* between what initially appeared to be very different discourses and practices in each case study. Equally as significant, however, was how this concept of paradoxical publicness began to open up a new and productive way of viewing, and also of understanding, differences between the three initiatives. Using this concept the three case studies could be seen as bringing into being *different ways of articulating ideas of change and continuity*. Each initiative offered a greater political role for publics, valorising ideas of public self-organisation and public leadership while at the same time stressing the importance of established political organisations, certain conventions and ongoing public projects. Understood in this way, public participation became a performance in which continuity and change would need to be somehow mediated, managed, negotiated and possibly reconciled.

The concept of paradoxical publicness helps illuminate the dynamics at stake in each of the case study sites, bringing competing ideas of the public into a relationship with one another. As I have shown, these dynamics operated differently in each site, but they were traceable in all of them.

To elaborate this idea, I shall need to develop an approach that will enable me to engage with and shed further light on these practices of public participation. The next test here therefore will be whether or not the analytical framework that has begun to be developed here might help account for:

- The practices through which publicness was actually enacted in these settings as participants interacted with one another, and negotiated the conceptions of publics and politics that were offered to them;
- The practices through which public 'results' were elicited through the ways in which each initiative was assembled, organised and managed.

I shall claim in section 6.4 of this chapter that the concept of paradoxical publicness can help account for the diverse results of participants' interactions within and across the different settings. Before this, however, the next section works to further illuminate the concept of paradoxical publicness.

6.3 Theorising paradoxical publicness

It was through the work of Michael Warner (2002) that I first observed the connections between pre-existing work on the public and the set of dynamics that the notion of paradoxical publicness brings to the fore. For this reason I shall begin here by highlighting the connections between this concept and the theory of the public that Warner constructs in his (2002) volume *Publics and Counterpublics*. I shall then highlight the connections between the ideas of paradoxical publicness and those ideas developed in papers by Margaret Canovan (1999) and Derrida and Roudinesco (2004).

In *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), Michael Warner excavates the origins of modern publics and reflects on their characteristics. The theory that he constructs as a result of his deliberations has already been touched on in chapter 2 (section 2.3) posits the idea that modern publics are *inherently unstable*. For Warner, this is because the two key ‘enabling postulates’ (ibid: 106) that he claims facilitate the formation of any public *always exist in a relation of conflict* with each other.

The presupposition of what he calls a “social base” (ibid: 106) is the *first* of Warner’s enabling postulates. Reaching strangers is, according to Warner, “a public discourses primary orientation”. However, “to make these strangers into a public it [public discourse] must locate them as a social entity” (ibid: 106) he asserts. Public discourse “selects participants by criteria of shared social space (though not necessarily territorial space), habitus, topical concerns, intergeneric references, and circulating intelligible forms” (ibid: 106). It is this process, Warner claims, that enables confidence that public discourse “will circulate along a real path”. However, he adds, it is also this process that works to “limit that path” (ibid: 106).

The *second* of Warner's enabling postulates is the premise that publics must be *self-organised* (ibid: 72).

"Whether faith is justified or partly ideological, a public can only produce a sense of belonging and activity if it is self-organised [...] rather than through an external framework. [...]

Belonging to a public seems to require at least minimal participation, even if it is patient or notional, rather than a permanent state of being" (2002: 70-71)

The reason that Warner claims that these publics are inherently unstable is because his analysis shows that these entities will always be pre-constituted in certain ways over others, while at the same time will be reliant for their credibility on the idea of their being in some way self-organised.

There are several clear parallels between the particular set of tensions that Warner asserts are inherent in any form of public performance and the set of tensions that the notion of paradoxical publicness works to bring into view. The discourses of the public that are inscribed in the idea of paradoxical publics echo the two 'enabling postulates' that Warner claims are key to the formation of any public. Promises and offers of self-organisation are key to the *discourses of public change* that run through the three cases. *Discourses of public continuity* echoed Warner's other 'enabling postulate'. To make "strangers into a public", he asserts, public speech must "locate" a public in "shared social space", "topical concerns", "forms" and "references" (2002:106). *Discourses of public continuity* took on this role in the publicity materials; in these cases they did so by working to align the publics in these exercises with *certain pre-existing organisations, ways of working and particular ongoing public projects over others*.

Warner's theory of public formation can be used to help account for the co-presence of the discourses of change and continuity discussed in section 6.2. Warner's theory can also be used, moreover, to help further reflect on the idea of paradoxical publicness. According to Warner at least, all publics have a seemingly contradictory or paradoxical character. The formation of publics *has* to be rooted in, or at least mediated by, pre-existing cultural forms (ibid: 72) *and* faith in public self-organisation.

While this makes publics structurally unstable, it does not mean that it is impossible to perform as a public. Warner accounts for public performances by showing how public discourse has a "projective", "circulatory" (ibid: 113) and "reflexive" (ibid: 90) character, and by showing that the enactment of publicness is reliant on relations of call and response. While any public discourse may work to locate and characterise its public in particular ways (over others), it is nevertheless reliant for its circulation on the volitional work of actors who (at least in principle) have the capacity for forms of self-organisation. In theory, this means that public discourse is always vulnerable to mutation. This is what Warner describes as the "fruitful perversity" (ibid: 113) of public discourse. A public, he concludes, is "an engine for (not necessarily progressive) social mutation" (ibid: 113).

The tensions and instabilities that I have traced in developing the concept of paradoxical publicness may be viewed, if we follow Warner, as tensions and instabilities that are inherent in any process of public participation. Warner's theory provides support for research that seeks to explore and account for how these tensions and dynamics are mediated and articulated in practice. His work also provides further impetus for research that seeks to identify what forms of social

mutation are (and are not) afforded by particular public participation exercises. Lastly, Warner's account suggests that even if those who participated in these exercises were unaware of the different conceptions of the public, as I have analysed them here, they would still be required to negotiate their paradoxical status. My findings build on this, suggesting that the ways in which paradoxical images are articulated and paradoxical identities negotiated may differ in different domains of participation: governmental, entertainment and social movement activism.

Having summarised the results of my engagement with Warner's theory, I now want briefly to highlight how the (1999) article, *Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy* by political theorist Margaret Canovan, also helped me to reflect on the concept of paradoxical publicness. Offering an analysis of the relationship between populism and democracy, Canovan uses this paper to assert that democracy has what she calls, "two opposing faces", a "redemptive" and a "pragmatic" face (1999:2). Pragmatically, Canovan asserts, "democracy is a way of coping peacefully with the conflicts of modern societies by means of a highly contingent collection of rules and practices [...] democracy means institutions" (1999:10). Redemptive politics, meanwhile, "promise salvation" and have a "strong anti-institutional impulse" combined with a "romantic impulse to directness, spontaneity and the overcoming of alienation" (1999:10). While the tensions between these two faces of democracy are "very great", she continues, "it is an illusion to suppose we can have one without the other" (1999:10):

"[T]hese two faces of democracy are a pair of squabbling Siamese twins, inescapably linked"
(ibid: 10)

For Canovan, “when too great a gap opens up between haloed democracy and the grubby business of politics, populists tend to move into the vacant territory, promising in place of the dirty world of party manoeuvring the shining idea of democracy renewed” (ibid: 12). In practice, according to Canovan, populist movements sometimes react by empowering charismatic leaders who promise to break with the routines of bureaucratic institutions and turn politics into a more personal experience (ibid: 14). On other occasions populist movements may also react by calling for the return of “democracy to the grassroots” and for “greater transparency and directness between the popular will and the democratic act”. In short, populists also sometimes agitate for forms of “participatory democracy” (ibid: 15).

Canovan’s account chimed with some of the ideas of politics that were implied by the notion of paradoxical publicness. The ideas propounded through the *discourses of public change* that have been shown to have run through the three cases echo the ideas Canovan presents through her idea of *redemptive* politics. In common with each is the idea that political elites cannot be trusted to lead politics; what Canovan calls a strong ‘anti-institutional impulse’; an impatience for a more direct form of politics; and a bias towards more participative and grassroots forms of democratic organisation. There are also parallels between the *discourse of public continuity* which I have identified, and Canovan’s concept of *pragmatic politics*.

There appears to be an overlap here between this discourse and the concept of pragmatic politics with each emphasising the role and value of incumbent organisations and already existing political frameworks. It is Canovan’s notion of populism, however, that resonates most strongly with the analysis undertaken in section 6.2 (above). Most striking here are the similarities between the narratives of

political crises and renewal that are integral to the discourses of change described in section 6.2 and Canovan's account of the dynamics through which populism arises.

For Canovan, populism arises when "too great a gap opens up between haloed democracy [or redemptive politics] and the grubby business of [pragmatic] politics" (1999:12). Populism, for Canovan, is understood as an appeal to "the people" against established structures of power and dominant ideas and values (1999:2) which arises (or is possibly generated) when claims about an imbalance and a disconnection between elites and institutions and 'the people' can be effectively mobilised. What is particularly useful here is the way Canovan pinpoints populism as a reaction to forms of imbalance and disconnection. The implication here is that populist modes of public performance, those that emphasise more bottom-up, direct and publicly led forms of politics, exist not as forms of politics that are completely separate from more 'pragmatic' modes of enactment. Instead, the implication is that forms of populism are immanent to democratic politics generally and exist in a reflexive and dialectical (if also fraught) relationship with more established and institutionally-mediated forms of practice.

The idea that different forms of politics might exist in relation to one another and that different articulations of these ideas are the result of different processes of political mediation, negotiation, contestation and enactment, summons-up a temporal dimension to this discussion. Issues of temporality run through both Warner's account of the public and Canovan's account of democratic politics. If the publics of these exercises are being addressed in different ways at the same time, this calls up publics that are paradoxical. One way of understanding the public performances that

were enacted, then, would be to recognise them as different kinds of *responses* to this particular, paradoxical, form of address.

In one way the core tensions that have been highlighted here – between pre-determined and self-organised forms of public performance, between the pragmatic and redemptive faces of democratic politics and between discourses of public continuity and change – all highlight two distinct ways of thinking about the future: one anticipated and programmed and another open-ended and indeterminate (Derrida and Roudinesco, 2004). Each of these two distinct ways of thinking about the future connects, in turn, to alternative ways of thinking about political autonomy, responsibility (cf. Barnett, 2005:644-645) and therefore subjectivity. Discourses of public continuity invite publics to affirm or at least acknowledge the value of pre-existing organisations. Discourses of public change meanwhile invite publics to exercise their own autonomy, critical capacities and to discharge their responsibility to organise through their own effort.

The notion of paradoxical publicness was originally generated in section 6.2 to help account for the results of a comparative analysis of the three case studies. Allying this concept with a sample of contemporary theoretical work on the public and politics has enriched my work and helped me elaborate on this concept. This process has demonstrated how the concept resonates with several important and much more long-standing debates about the constitution of publics and practices of democratic politics. The way of investigating and theorising public participation that this concept opens up therefore has the potential to make a contribution to these debates and to the analysis of public participation exercises beyond the three cases.

It is important not to run ahead of myself however. So, in the final section of this chapter I want to explore how the concept of paradoxical publicness was translated and performed by participants in my three case study sites.

6.4 Performing paradoxical publicness

Even a glance at the material documented and described in sections 3.3, 4.3 and 5.3 of the three case study chapters indicates that there are some stark differences between the results of participant interactions and performances within *and* across the three cases. In order to account for these differences it is necessary to explore whether the concept of paradoxical publicness can help to account for these practices.

Where a narrative of crisis was developed around relations between a local public and its Council, participants of Harrow Open Budget were offered opportunities to self-organise and lead by feeding-into and developing some this Council's ongoing policy and budgetary choices. As I noted in chapter 3, one set of choices that arose for discussion centred on the issue of local waste-management. Some of the results of this particular discussion elaborated on the pre-constituted public policy options with which participants were presented while other results showed participants proposing completely new options. Both kinds of 'results' of this particular discussion could be understood as responses to the invitation to self-organise and lead *and* as a response to co-operate and be led. The public can be seen here

therefore to be negotiating the paradoxical role it had been offered, albeit in ways that were afforded and encouraged by the event itself.

In the case of Vote for Me – where political renewal was linked to giving a national public of television viewers an opportunity to bypass political parties and professional politicians – participants were again offered the chance to self-organise and lead politics, this time through an initiative set up and managed by a national television broadcaster. Drawing on and adapting some of the conventions of both reality television and ‘Westminster’ politics, this initiative aimed to find a ‘new kind of politician’ who could more effectively represent the UK public in Parliament.

The publicity used to promote this exercise, and the practices used to facilitate the programme, afforded a different rendition of paradoxical publicness, allowing participants to enact and articulate change and continuity in another way entirely. Within this exercise there were differences between the ways that contestants performed their paradoxical status. Some presented packages of policies that were ‘serious’ and somewhat familiar, such as more progressive taxation frameworks or improvements in social housing for example, but sought to do so as ‘authentic’ ‘ordinary’ people appearing on reality television.

Other contestants sought to tap into pre-existing public sentiments or pre-existing, but currently marginal, public campaigns by presenting novel policies. These included, for example, a new bank-holiday in honour of Bruce Forsyth, or public floggings for those found guilty of violent misdemeanours, marking contestants out as different from conventional party-politicians.

Others performed as 'single issue' candidates by campaigning, for example, against the spread of mobile phone-masts, or for improvements in the NHS and, in so doing, presented themselves as more *independent* than more established party-politicians.

Each of these forms of performance worked to demonstrate that contestants were self-organising and leading politics for themselves *and* that they were representing either an existing public-issue that was not currently being dealt with satisfactorily by mainstream politicians, or representing a familiar issue in a new way, as an *ordinary, authentic* member of the public. Viewed in this way these enactments of publicness can each be understood as forms of performance that articulated ideas of public change with ideas of public continuity, albeit in a different way.

The crisis brought on by global, 'neo-liberal', governance in the setting of the 4th European Social Forum, finally, was depicted as the crisis perpetuated by 'neo-liberal' institutions and practices. Participants were offered opportunities to self-organise and lead politics through an array of social movement organisations and to work as part of a public who were collectively involved in resisting 'neo-liberalism' and in developing alternatives. The diverse results arising from the workshops and seminars that I attended during this event may be understood as articulating particular ideas of change and continuity, ranging from joint action plans, agreements to set-up co-operation networks, the identification of areas of disagreement and the formulation of various conclusions following lengthy discussion. These results emerged from activities entailing forms of self-organisation in which actors from pre-existing social movement organisations formulated ways of taking forward specific pre-existing resistance projects and initiatives aimed at generating alternative to neo-liberal forms of globalisation.

The proposal beginning to be developed here is that different renditions of paradoxical publicness – renditions generated in the publicity materials and assembly practices of each initiative – in some way shaped the results that were produced in these settings. To develop this claim, I want to compare and explore how these relationships were mediated and produced.

My argument here is that different renditions of paradoxical publicness entailed the privileging of *differently nuanced* ideas of change and continuity through which the three initiatives constructed normative frameworks for public participation. Because these frameworks brought into being imperatives that were in conflict with one another, these frameworks were contradictory and unstable, or at least inconsistent. For this reason, these processes both opened up *and* worked to delimit opportunities for public participation. An additional tension between different sets of normative assumptions regarding the constitution of publics also begins to come into view once we observe the results these initiatives afforded.

The tension here is one between the idea that publics need to speak as a singular public or be made to speak, as an outcome of public participation, with a unified voice (this idea applied in the cases of the Harrow Open Budget and Vote for Me); and the idea that publics can speak, and should be allowed to speak (as an outcome of public participation exercises) as a heterogeneous entity with many different voices (as was the case in the 4th European Social Forum). The key point here is that these different ideas about how publics are, or should be, constituted were each, nevertheless, inscribed at different points into the mediation practices through which publics were assembled and produced in each of the three cases.

One further assumption inscribed into the normative theories of public participation which underpinned the case studies was that the publics called into being would be, or should be, *benign publics* – that is to say, publics that would somehow, necessarily, produce more benign forms of politics than were currently being produced by more conventional means. Again, running through each exercise, there were different normative ideas of what constitutes a benign public and different ideas about how such a public should be produced.

A benign public in the setting of the 4th European Social Forum is a transnational/local public who can address the challenges of ‘neo-liberalism’; and a heterogeneous public that acts in a multiplicity of different ways to address this challenge and that of how to bring into being more benign alternatives.

In the setting of Harrow Open Budget, a benign public is a public that engages in partnership with the Council, working to a common agenda and helping to legitimate its democratic practices in general, as well as in specific policy decisions. It is a public able to be aggregated and made to speak with a unified voice. In Vote for Me, a benign public is a UK public who will produce a more benign rendition of democratic parliamentary politics, giving it a different and more *popular* framework – a framework that would allow a new, more benign process of political representation.

In addition to bringing these normative theories to the fore this research makes it possible to identify a few of the ways that participants contested these normative ideas of what constitutes a benign public. In the setting of Harrow Open Budget, participants contested the normative ideas running through this initiative by

generating, for example, sets of new and more ambitious policy-proposals during discussion activities.

Participants in the 4th European Social Forum contested the normative ideals of what constitutes a benign public as inscribed in publicity materials and assembly practices by calling for a unified leadership and programme of priorities to be established. The normative ideas of what constitutes a benign public as inscribed in the publicity materials were again contested in Vote for Me when the viewers voted for and eventually elected a reactionary contestant as the winner of this contest.

These processes of negotiating paradoxical publicness entailed – and even necessitated – processes of *translation*. This concept can be used to begin to conceptualise the relationship between renditions of the idea of paradoxical publicness and the range of results that was produced by participants during their interactions in these three settings. The concept of translation has been developed in several different literatures and is therefore a term that has *itself* been translated somewhat differently in different disciplinary settings, including linguistics (see for example Steiner, 1998); sociology (see for example Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992); post-colonial studies (see for example Loomba, 1998 or Niranjana, 1992); and particularly of late, in a branch of sociological scholarship concerned with the study of scientific knowledge and innovation (see for example Callon, 1986; Latour 1993, 1996; Latour and Weibel, 2005).

In contemporary linguistics, authors such as Steiner (1998) use the term ‘translation’ to describe the work that is implicit in every act of communication (1998:7). For Steiner the work of communication is creative, interpretative work that changes the

meaning or substance of an idea or term. Communication for Steiner and others is not therefore about the transfer of knowledge or information but is instead a creative, inventive and ongoing process of transformation (1998: 448).

Sociologists such as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) seek to extend this idea of translation by drawing attention to the webs of social relations within which translations take place. These authors stress the ways in which social relations impact on practices of translation, endowing different translators and different translations with different levels of authority in particular settings (1992: 142-3). Post-colonial theorists have used a similar approach to stress the historical and cultural conditions within which translations are made and the effects of these conditions on the translations that are either accepted or rejected in particular contexts (Niranjana, 1992).

However, one of the more recent and influential bodies of theoretical work concerning the concept and practice of 'translation' has been developed by scholars of scientific knowledge and innovation Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, who use 'translation' to characterise the mediation processes and practices through which ideas and/or objects are brought into a relationship.

For Latour, such work entails the "redistribution of properties that had previously been dispersed" (Latour, 1996: 36) while for Callon such practices inevitably entail "mutual definition and inscription" (Callon, 1991: 143). Connections or new relationships are generated and sustained through what these authors call intermediaries: people or things that serve to characterise relationships. Mediators

are “actors endowed with the capacity to translate what they transport, to redefine [it], and also betray [it]” (Latour, 1993: 81).

The idea of translation is particularly useful for the form of analysis being conducted here since it can imply movement. The idea also describes practices that work (temporarily) to stabilise meanings and relationships. Translation as a way of understanding practices of communication and interaction is also useful since it emphasises the creativity or adaptive potentials of these processes. The ideas of translation reviewed here are helpful, furthermore, because they foreground the processual and temporal characteristics of the three public-participation exercises as they were enacted at different points and moments. Finally, such ideas are useful because these accounts highlight the importance of considering the webs of social and political relations within which various translations and results are made.

In this section I have begun to illuminate the tensions between change and continuity which were – across the three cases – translated, negotiated and articulated through three kinds of processes:

- Processes of discursive translation and articulation;
- Processes of facilitation and mediation during assembly events;
- By publics themselves as they performed in each setting and translated and enacted the competing ideas of publicness that they were offered in this setting.

I have also sought to show the different renditions of publicness that were privileged in each setting and how they worked both to afford and delimit acts of translation and enactment.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have used the concept of paradoxical publicness to open up a particular way of conducting a comparative analysis of the three cases. By doing so, I have begun to develop a novel way of exploring the diverse results of the three exercises. It is crucial at this stage to clarify what is meant by a 'result'. At some points I have been referring to results that have been produced *during*, or possibly *in the midst*, of these different exercises. At other points I have been referring to end-results, conclusions or possibly what might be considered as the *outcomes* of these events. The research approach I have used has meant that I have been able to pinpoint various differences between these results. Analysing the temporalities of these events has made it possible to draw attention to the role of various kinds of mediation and translation practices, and their role in the production of various results.

My analysis has highlighted the importance of differences between how these initiatives were set up *and* differences between how participants were organised and managed in each setting, during each exercise. There is evidence indicating that renditions of paradoxical publicness were inscribed in both publicity materials and assembly practices. Each opened-up and worked to limit the opportunities that participants were offered to perform translation work. By tracing and beginning to map differences between these practices and the various results and outcomes they afforded this section highlights some of the ways in which these exercises worked as "engines of (not necessarily progressive) mutation" (Warner, 2002: 113). The concept of paradoxical publicness has provided a framework has begun to allow me to trace differences between different kinds of 'engine', and a framework that can help with the process of discerning between the different the kinds of 'social mutation' that the different engines did and did not afford.

The claim made at the start of this chapter was that, in order to account for the co-presence of the three different orientations towards public participation in each of the three cases, it would be necessary to develop a way of analysing and theorising these practices – a way of theorising these practices that takes us beyond assumptions that these distinct orientations operate separately in separate domains of practice.

While I have not yet been able to account for the co-existence of the three orientations in the three cases, I have in this chapter begun to develop a conceptual framework for analysing and accounting for the forms of publicness enacted within and across the three settings. I have shown here not only that there were differences between the ideas of the public summoned-up in each case, but I have also identified similarities and drawn from this the idea of *paradoxical publics*. By bringing competing ideas of the public into relation with one another, each case – both the organisers/facilitator and the publics summoned to participate – had to find ways of mediating, negotiating and translating them. This finding is important as it demonstrates that tensions were inscribed in the ideas of the public that were promoted across the three settings.

The task now is to take this analysis one step further by bringing to the fore the different modes of politics elicited and enacted in the case study sites; forms of politics that were used to mediate, manage and obscure the tensions that have been brought to the fore here.

Chapter 7

Spectacular political experiments

In order to address the second of my research objectives, this chapter will compare and thereby further explore **the modes of politics brought into being by the three cases**. I shall begin in section 7.1 by bringing to the fore how the three initiatives were constructed as *spectacular political experiments*. Section 7.2 then compares how these experiments were designed and performed, tracing similarities and differences between the design strategies which were used to mediate, manage and order these political performances. The final section (section 7.3) then constructs a case for why these exercises need to be understood as *spectacles* and why the subject position produced for (and adopted by) public participants was that of the *active spectator*.

Using the material provided by the case studies, this chapter sets out to engage critically with the idea – summoned up in these initiatives – that these exercises offer either a more *direct* or a more *authentic* form of politics. I argue that such an idea is untenable in that the modes of politics enacted in each case were highly mediated performances. However, far from using the idea of public participation as performance to denigrate this form of politics, I make the case for understanding these and other similar kinds of events as *spectacles*.

This chapter traces how these initiatives imagine, construct and enact publicness; how they exercise us to think about the paradoxical nature of public participation; and how the idea of a unitary political subject is undermined by these practices. It

also suggests how these events invite us to reflect on the meaning and practice of political engagement, political organisation and political development as all being *potentially* generative. For these reasons this chapter asserts that a way of viewing these initiatives could be as a set of practices that establishes, and pre-figures, new normative 'pathways' for publicness and political practice.

In this chapter a politics of public mediation emerges from my analysis of differences and similarities between the cases. This is a conceptual, anthropological and participatory politics that brings to the fore, and experiments with, ways of negotiating the tensions and paradoxes that are (inevitably) inscribed and installed into these forms of political practice. The aim of this chapter is to make the case for and contribute to the longer-term project of developing a politics public mediation that is both theoretically informed and empirically grounded.

7.1 Constructing *spectacular political experiments*

In this section I will set out some striking similarities between the three cases that, together, characterise these initiatives as *spectacular political experiments*. In addition to outlining these similarities this section will underline the importance of a set of differences between how each of these spectacular political experiments was set up.

These three initiatives were constructed as radical breaks from already existing forms of politics and as such involved the organisations stressing that these exercises would enable 'new' forms of public self-organisation, self-representation, experience, conduct and self-governance. In this way each initiative held out the

possibility of an open-ended and therefore indeterminate mode of politics. The three initiatives were also set up as exercises that would give their participants the opportunity to pursue and develop particular ongoing political projects with a range of pre-existing political organisations. In this way, each initiative offered a process through which participants were able to reconcile tensions between these forms of public action and by doing this perform politics in more direct, transparent and publicly-directed ways.

It is appropriate to term these initiatives spectacular political experiments because each holds-out the promise of a radical disjuncture from more established approaches to politics and public action. This term is apposite because these initiatives were constructed as modes of politics that would be more publicly accountable and engaging and would address various democratic deficits and thereby lead to forms of political renewal. Organised in this way each exercise was constituted as a more advanced and superior mode of practice that would demonstrate (and even *pre-figure*) forms of social and political transformation.

The work of constructing these exercises as spectacular political experiments was, as I have indicated here, *discursive* work conducted mainly through publicity materials. An equally important part of this work was concerned with the *practice* of convening and managing these exercises. It is not my intention to claim a general distinction between text and practice but rather to draw attention to the different ways that publics and politics were constructed in the different sets of materials I have analysed in this research. The design of each public assembly related to the promotional work undertaken in each settings but was also different from it.

Discursive work conducted through the promotional materials privileged certain normative concepts of the public and politics. The designs of these assemblies

worked to set up what Cooper (analysing another form of pre-figurative politics) has termed “new normative pathways” that invite actors to enact forms of normativity through “the performativity of their usage” (2001:132-139). In the settings I am concerned with here, assembly designs worked in this way to invite participants to enact these events as spectacular and experimental undertakings and thereby perform, demonstrate and pre-figure spectacular and experimental forms of politics. In particular, three design strategies and associated forms of practice worked to construct the three initiatives examined here. I want to outline these strategies and discuss each in more detail in section 7.2:

1. *Boundary design.*

Spatial and temporal boundary-setting practices were used in each setting to delineate the *eventfulness* of these spectacular political experiments. Boundary-setting practices worked to make the forms of political practice enacted by these exercises place specific and function according to specific time limits. In this way these practices were located in *enclaves* of extraordinary time-space, bound off from both the routines of established politics and the routines of everyday life. These enclaves were designed as intensive microclimates that would be especially hospitable to, and supportive of, the performance of novel, spectacular and experimental forms of politics and public action.

2. *Designs enabling ‘new’ forms of political conduct.*

Another way each exercise set about casting itself as spectacular and experimental was by offering participants the chance to perform politics differently. Each exercise offered participants opportunities to perform more authentically and by so doing offered the potential for more *direct* and publicly-organised and publicly-directed form of politics.

3. Design strategies that cast these events as *facilitative*.

Using a range of design strategies, the technologies and processes through which publics were assembled and managed during these events were given a facilitative character and a *technical, impartial* and *objective* feel. These technologies and processes were also set up as systematic and fair, enabling and empowering and in these ways the modes of politics and forms of publicness that these exercises claimed they would bring into being were set up as forms of practice that would emerge, somehow *naturally* and *spontaneously*, during these events, simply as a result of participants interactions and efforts. Set up in this way these ways these practices became spectacular and experimental in their own right, processes that would potentially allow participants to enact 'new' and more advanced modes of practice.

The process of identifying that a mode of spectacular and experimental politics was privileged across the cases was, for me, a significant moment in my research process. It illuminated congruencies between the strategies that were used in each setting to mark these exercises out as different from, and superior to, more established modes of politics.

Progressing this analysis further, however, it is necessary not only to focus on similarities but also on differences. This makes it possible to highlight exactly how each initiative offered participants a different kind of spectacular political experiment. Some of the differences between the normative ideas and political pathways that were privileged in each setting have already been highlighted in chapter 6 (section 6.2 and 6.4) so I shall simply re-iterate them here in outline form.

Each exercise was different in that it privileged a different political scale; it differently constructed ideas of democratic deficit; it differently constructed sets of ideas regarding how these deficits need to be addressed; it addressed different political aspirations; and privileged different event spatialities and temporalities. Again, differences are significant, demonstrating as they do, that each initiative worked to *mediate* these spectacular and experimental modes of politics in significantly different ways. Each stressed and thereby privileged different normative ideas and pathways and, in doing so, worked to bracket-out other potential ways of mediating publicness, participation and politics.

The findings I have begun to outline in this section once again question the idea that these exercises were directed solely by those enrolled as participants in these settings. They also undermine the idea that the subject positions offered to participants were offered were, at least in any straightforward sense, more authentic than that those offered by more established forms of politics. I have demonstrated that a spectacular and experimental mode of politics was privileged in each setting and also highlighted differences between how this mode of politics was configured in each case. Tensions begin to arise here between how the places and times of participation, the aspirations of these events and the forms of practice were offered to participants. What begins to emerge here, it seems, is a *politics of public mediation*.

By tracing the contours of this politics of public mediation, I can begin to provide another perspective on the empirical material. This perspective affords a better appreciation of the *contingency* of the event's designs. Having begun to show the centrality of mediation to these exercises, I now want to bring, once more, the three cases into relation in order to explore in more detail how these assemblies were mediated in practice.

7.2 Spectacular and experimental political mediation

In this section I shall extend the analysis undertaken in the previous section by focusing on three design strategies that were deployed across the cases. There are two overlapping aims here: first, I want to show in more detail how assembly designs helped to mediate these events as spectacular political experiments; and, secondly, I want to show how these mediation practices worked to make these exercises *manageable* and *orderly*.

In the previous section, I pinpointed a set of three design strategies used across the case study settings to help construct these exercises as spectacular political experiments: first, *boundary design*; second, design strategies enabling *more diverse forms of public conduct*; and, third, design strategies casting these events as *facilitative*. In this section, I shall compare a little more closely how these strategies were deployed and, in this way, analyse the mediation practices that these strategies worked to install in these settings.

In the previous section I indicated how boundary-setting practices were used in each case to delineate the eventfulness of each exercise and how they did this by making events place specific and time limited. I also suggested how these events were, through these means, cast as *enclaves* of extraordinary time-space – microclimates especially hospitable to, and supportive of, the mode of spectacular and experimental politics that was privileged across the three cases.

I should like to show here some of the varying ways in which these boundary-setting practices worked in each case to mediate, manage and order these events. In each setting these practices worked to divide-off the assemblies from the wider world *and* to relate them to, and render them representative of, particular scales of political practice. By staging the Harrow Open Budget assembly in the sports hall of

Harrow's municipal leisure centre and behind closed doors, this event was removed from the wider world outside. However, by convening a 'representative' cross-section of a particular local population to engage with issues of local public policy, this assembly was, at the same time, designed to be a place that represented the wider public and Harrow beyond the boundaries of this hall.

Despite its being dispersed across the UK and strung-out between ITV's main studios in London, various 'locations' around the country and across over one million viewers sitting rooms, *Vote for Me* was nevertheless also bounded in several senses. The programme was designed as a self-contained television event, with its access carefully managed by the designated boundaries between contestants in the studio and viewers at home. By appealing to a national audience a boundary was constituted between a particular national polity (and a national scale of politics) and that of alternative polities (and other scales of politics).

Boundary setting practices functioned differently in the setting of the 4th European Social Forum. As with the case of Harrow Open Budget, the main 4th European Social Forum assembly event was designed in a way that worked to isolate this event from the world beyond, by staging the main part of this exercise within a large conference centre. By convening a group of activists from a range of different locales and nations the place of this event was also set up as a transnational or translocal setting that – while located on the outskirts of Athens – was also a place that brought into relation different national and local spaces and scales of politics.

The various practices highlighted here all worked to install boundaries between particular, and different, ideas of place, political territory, scale and publicness.

Lezuan has observed how boundary setting-practices of this kind work to install what he has called “experimental gap[s]” (2006:181). By constructing such gaps, these initiatives were differentiated from the world outside and its complexity and characterised as safe places that would afford greater openness and indeterminacy (cf. Lezuan, 2006: 180-181). In these ways these practices worked to install gaps between the particular sets of ideas, issues, norms and modes of conduct privileged by the three different exercises and those practices ‘beyond’ these boundaries. Particular sets of ideas, issues, norms and activities were thus marked as ‘internal’ to these boundaries while others were marked as ‘external’ to these events and given the status of ‘turbulence’, ‘interference’ or ‘noise’.

Boundary-setting practices were not only used in each setting to mediate, direct, manage and order ideas and activities but also to circumscribe the *temporalities* of these events. They did this in two ways. First, by bounding the amounts of clock-time allocated for each exercise these events and the different activities within them were allocated different durations and different tempos. Overall, this also gave different participants different senses of how long participative exercises need to last and when they should begin and end. Secondly, each worked to entangle participants in different narratives of recent history and the future: a narrative of local crisis and imminent local government renewal in the case of Harrow Open Budget; a narrative of national crisis and the possibility of short-term institutional revival in the case of Vote for Me; and a narrative of global/transnational/translocal crisis and the chance to take part in a more long-term transformation project in the case of the 4th European Social Forum.

The participants sometimes contested these conceptual and more concrete forms of partitioning work. For example, in chapter 3, I showed how participants contested the local framing of the Harrow Open Budget by relating issues of waste-

management to wider national and global political issues such as the production of 'excessive' packaging materials and the spread of fast food culture. Chapter 4 featured Rodney Hylton-Potts, the winner of Vote for Me, problematising the national framing of this exercise by foregrounding the issue of transnational migration. Chapter 5 highlighted tensions between those participants in the 4th European Social Forum who wish to affiliate to the World Social Forum Charter of principles and take part in the main event and those who, while agreeing with many of these principles, did not oppose violence and who threatened to up-stage those 'inside' this 'movement of movements' when participants in this event moved outside of the conference centre venue and took to the street to enact a demonstration.

The modes of politics and the notions of publicness that these initiatives enacted and privileged were therefore disparate ones, with each offering a different sense of where, when, how and for what reason political participation should take place and each thereby limiting and opening-up different possibilities for participation. These differences become evident not only by juxtaposing the assembly designs but also by exploring how participants interacted within 'the bounds' of these different events. Boundary-setting practices were therefore used to construct these exercises as being spectacular political experiments; as being enclaves of extraordinary time-space; and as being hospitable and supportive of 'new' ways of enacting politics and publicness (while also subtly working to mediate, manage and order these events).

Yet another of the ways that each initiative constructed itself as a spectacular political experiment was through its holding-out to participants the prospect of enabling 'new' forms of public conduct. Each event offered participants the opportunity to perform more *authentically*, as themselves, and promised the potential of a more direct and publicly-generated form of politics. As such, these

exercises were set up in each case as pre-figurative and potentially transformative political-practices.

So, for example, in chapter 3 participants were invited to enact forms of deliberative practice and offered chances to perform in less formal and more pleasure-oriented ways that diverged from images of formal, rational-deliberative political processes. In chapter 4, Vote for Me offered participants (both at home and in the studio) a structured and systematic process through which they could deliberate upon the qualities of different contestants within a framework that promised all its participants an evening of drama and comedy. In chapter 5 I describe how those participants in the 4th European Social Forum were afforded a variety of opportunities in which to engage deliberatively such as workshops, seminars *and* excitement and entertainment-oriented modes of performance. Although the forms of pleasure and entertainment offered in each setting varied widely, I should like to highlight here the similarities between how the various opportunities to perform in these different ways were organised.

These similarities became evident when I compared the assembly designs and noticed that, in each case, a separation was maintained between what were constituted as *more formal* and *less formal* modes of conduct. I observed that each of these designs lent a different status to each of these modes of conduct. What was constituted as a less formal activity and form of conduct was, in each case, set up as a form of practice through which participants would be able to access experiences that were exciting, pleasurable, or fun.

More formal activities and modes of conduct were set up, across the three cases, as those forms of practice which would allow participants to generate serious political 'results'. By aligning one of these forms of conduct with the production of 'serious' political results and another solely with the production of fleeting affective experiences, a hierarchical relationship was established between these different modes of conduct. This worked differently in each setting and can be illustrated by the following examples:

- In the case of Harrow Open Budget, music was deployed to add fun and a sense of informality to the business of voting on different public policy options; conviviality was also fostered through carefully-planned seating arrangements; and participants were rewarded for their deliberative efforts by an amusing and trivial quiz at the end of the event;
- A dramatic reality television format was used to structure and present Vote for Me in order to deliver moments of comedy, drama and human interest. However, as the contest proceeded, participants were increasingly judged on the basis of their capacities to perform as 'Westminster'-style politicians with many participants being criticised and subsequently eliminated from the competition for being insufficiently 'serious';
- The extensive programme of 'cultural events' lent the 4th European Social Forum an informal festival feel. This undoubtedly made the events atmosphere very different from that of more conventional political meetings. However, even in this assembly, a separation was maintained between 'cultural' activities and the programme of more formal and more austere political 'seminars' and 'workshops'.

Each assembly design outlined above, used a combination of both formal and informal activities and modes of conduct to position these exercises as being different from, and more spectacular and experimental than, other more established forms of politics. However, I should like to concentrate here on the effects of the setting-up, separating and ordering of these 'different' modes of public conduct.

Those modes that were set up as less formal activities were given an important, though limited, role in these exercises; important in that they made these exercises look and feel different and therefore helped to construct these events as particular kinds of experiences. They were limited, however, because the 'informal' activities and modes of conduct were separated from the production of the results of these events. It was only during the more 'formal' activities where participants were invited to take a more formal, serious or deliberative postures that they were invited to shape results. Thus, event design strategy worked both to mediate an experience of 'new' politics and to manage and order participants in doing so to maximise their chances of making these activities 'productive'.

This strategy of separating what were constituted as being formal and informal activities had the effect of (re)inscribing (rather than breaking down) divisions and status differentials between different modes of conduct. The assembly designs worked to privilege, articulate and move between what were constituted as different forms of conduct at different points which had the effect of legitimising certain forms of conduct at particular moments and discrediting other forms as 'inappropriate' because these others had not been invited.

When more formal forms of conduct were offered a privileged status, less formal forms of conduct were sidelined and thereby cast as ‘turbulence’, ‘interference’ or ‘noise’. For example, in one of one of the ‘formal’ seminars I attended during the 4th European Social Forum, I witnessed one participant who shouted and spoke quickly, at the top of his voice, being told to ‘calm down’, ‘speak slowly’ and not to ‘get too excited’.

In the setting of Vote for Me, this was also in evidence on all those occasions when the judges dismissed aspects of contestants’ performances on the grounds that their performances were not sufficiently ‘serious’. There is therefore evidence of these ordering practices being contested. However, these incidents also show how participants were brought back into line when they contravened particular norms of conduct.

In one sense while these ordering practices were effective, the picture overall was much more ambiguous because, while assembly designs worked to manage and order these ‘different’ forms of conduct, possibilities were nevertheless opened-up in these settings for publics to perform in diverse ways. The form of politics produced as a result acknowledged that although subjects needed for stimulation, excitement, pleasure and entertainment they also needed more formal, deliberative and instrumental forms of practice and conduct. There is evidence to show that opportunities to perform in these different ways were regulated and ordered and that these different forms of conduct were given an unequal status during these events. However, these exercises were, none-the-less, constituted as events that performed a ‘new’ hybrid mode of politics. This was a mode politics that gave a status – albeit a different one – to each of these modes of public conduct: a politics that *interrupted*

as well as *reinforced* the idea that any one of these modes must have a privileged status.

I have attempted to show how the three events, constituted as spectacular political experiments, worked to meet the challenge of making themselves less formal, more stimulating and exciting than other more established modes of politics, while at the same time worked to make themselves productive and oriented towards the realisation of certain pre-constituted political aims. I should now like to focus on how those activities constituted as being more formal, deliberative and goal-oriented were mediated and managed. In each case these activities were presented as forms of practice that would allow participants to self-organise and to perform a mode of open-ended and indeterminate politics (what was termed *public change* in chapter 6); *and*, to enact a form of politics that would allow them to contribute to ongoing political projects (what was termed *public continuity* in chapter 6). My aim here is to identify how designs afforded participants opportunities to translate, negotiate and (temporarily) reconcile these different forms of public action in order to explore further how these initiatives operated, as spectacular political experiments.

As I argued in section 7.1, the more ‘formal’ activities undertaken as part of each exercise were lent a *technical*, somewhat *impartial* and *objective*-sounding feel, by positioning them as forms of ‘facilitative’ practice. Cast in this way, ‘facilitative’ practices were also positioned as being *enabling* and *empowering* activities that would somehow necessarily be systematic and fair. In these ways the new and superior form of publicly-directed politics that each exercise claimed it would bring into being was set up as something that would emerge, somehow *naturally* and *spontaneously*, during each of these events, simply as a result of participants’ interactions and efforts.

I have already highlighted in the case study chapters and in chapter 6 how – by privileging certain ideas and forms of practice – publicity materials and assembly designs worked to direct participants in a range of (often competing) ways. By comparing how formal activities were ‘facilitated’ across the cases, I have discovered a set of congruencies between how these activities were each mediated, managed and ordered. Across the cases, ‘formal’ activities were structured, managed and ordered using a three-phase process. The table below shows the three phases of activity that, in each case, structured the dynamics of ‘formal’ activities:

Phase	Form of practice
1	Naming and framing
2	Participation-work: negotiating paradoxical publicness
3	The generation of results, conclusions and endings

Table 7: The structure of ‘formal’ activities

Phase one, what I term (in table 7, above) as the *naming and framing* phase, worked in each setting to frame some of the basic characteristics of these activities. For example, in the setting of Harrow Open Budget, formal bouts of discussion lasted 30 minutes each and were given names such as ‘Reducing the amount of waste we produce’, ‘Tackling congestion’ and ‘Making our neighbourhoods feel safer’ (Harrow Open Budget ‘Discussion Guide’). The programme document specified that organised activities would offer participants a way of cooperating with their local council and of feeding into ongoing project of refining local public policy.

Vote for Me invited participants to cooperate with ITV to help renew the UK's main democratic institution (the UK Parliament). They would participate in this process through the various 'challenges' in which contestants were invited to take part: namely, the formal activities through which participants would be tested for their suitability as prospective politicians. For each challenge participants were told in advance how long they would have to perform, with some challenges, such as one named the 'speech making' challenge, lasting as little as 10 seconds.

During the 4th European Social Forum, activities that were called 'workshops' and 'seminars', were set up as formal activities, with 278 of these being listed in the official event programme. These workshops and seminars were convened by one or more pre-existing political organisations and offered participants the opportunity to get involved in an ongoing political discussion or form of political action. Workshops and seminars were given names such as 'Participatory Governance in European Cities', 'Organic Agriculture', 'Latin America: a continent in revolt!' and 'Flexibility and employee rights in retail business'.

Naming and framing practices took on different forms, though in each case they worked to specify how long participants would be given to enact particular activities as well as the topics and/or tasks around which participants were invited to convene. These practices also worked to specify the established organisations and ongoing political projects that these activities sought to develop. Such naming and framing practices were, however, somewhat ambiguous since while the topics for activities were prescribed in advance, participants were, in each case, invited to engage with, and to help further elaborate-on (or contest), these topics.

Naming and framing work laid the ground in each case for phase two of these formal activities, and this will be called here, the *participation-work* phase. I have described this participation work in detail in the case study chapters (see chapter 3 section 3.3, chapter section 4.3 and chapter 5, section 5.3). What is evident when looking across the cases is that participants were brought into relation with one other in different ways and in different numbers in each setting; and that different 'facilitation' processes, practices and technologies were used to mediate participation work in each particular case. However, the similarities of each case are also striking in that participation was set-up as work that would need to reconcile the opening-up of opportunities for forms of individual and collective self-organisation with the need to work to the agendas of ongoing political projects and/or pre-existing political organisations. In short, participation work in each setting invited participants to negotiate paradoxical publicness.

The third and final phase of these activities invited participants to *generate results, conclusions and endings*. Again, these practices were set up differently in each case, and led to the production of different kinds of results, conclusions and endings. In the setting of Vote for Me the process of generating results was two-fold. It entailed the panel of judges assessing the performances of the various contestants and, during the audition stage at least, deciding which contestants needed to stay and which needed to 'go home'. Those viewing at home were given the opportunity to judge themselves and, during the 'live' finals, to vote for their preferred contestant and thereby to influence the final result of the initiative.

The formal results of the Harrow Open Budget exercise involved another kind of process in which an initial set of results was generated through participants' deliberative discussion a selection of these results was recorded by table facilitators and collated in a document produced after the event. A further set of results –

positioned as the 'final' results of this assembly – was then produced through a series of polls. Using the wireless handheld keypads provided, the participants were invited to use these devices to register the degree to which they approved or disapproved of the different pre-constituted policy options associated with each of the five areas of public policy.

In the 4th European Social Forum the production of results and conclusions was less formally structured and prescriptive. However, in each of the workshops and seminars, I noticed that as each of these meetings drew to a close, the participants discussed conclusions and 'next steps' in order to consolidate what had been agreed (or disagreed) upon and developed some kind of action plan, declaration or a set of proposals, or else initiated a network through which further action could be organised. The third phase worked to demonstrate how it was possible to reconcile the practice of public self-organisation with the need to co-operate with pre-existing organisations to develop of ongoing political projects: in short, to demonstrate that these participative political activities could be 'productive'.

I have been able by identifying and describing how formal activities were structured as a three-phase process to cast further light on how these activities were, in practice, strung-together, managed and ordered as 'participative activities'. I have shown that there were similarities and differences between these practices and in bringing these practices into relation with one another, I have also demonstrated that, far from being 'objective', 'neutral' and purely technical procedures, these facilitative practices instead mediated and directed them, with different facilitative designs privileging different normative ideas and pathways over others. Participants were steered towards certain kinds of performance rather than being simply *empowered* or *enabled* to somehow naturally and spontaneously reconcile the imperatives for public continuity and change. In this way, facilitation practices not

only opened up possibilities for self-organisation but also limited these opportunities and thus privileged particular (and different) ways of reconciling the paradox of public participation identified in chapter 6.

These findings do not imply that these facilitative designs wholly determined forms of participation. As I have shown in the case study chapters and in chapter 6, participants translated these calls and opportunities for participation in many different ways. It is possible to highlight, by comparing how activities were designed, how different forms of participative conduct and different normative ideas and pathways came to be privileged and afforded (over others) in each of the settings. While these ideas and pathways were different in each case, I have highlighted similarities between the tensions and instabilities that were inscribed and installed into each of the three assembly designs.

7.3 The spectacle, the active spectator and the politics of public mediation

I have demonstrated in this chapter how a particular mode of politics was privileged across the settings and highlighted differences in the ways in which this mode of politics was in each case constructed and mediated. I have drawn out ways in which this mode of spectacular and experimental politics worked to open up opportunities for participants to perform in 'new' places, at 'new' times and in 'new' and possibly pre-figurative ways; how certain forms of conduct were privileged over others at different points; and how these designs worked to direct participants towards the production of certain results over others.

In this, the final section of the chapter, I want to take a step back from the detail of the empirical material in order to reflect on the implications of my findings. The aim here is to conceptualise more clearly the role that participants were offered during these exercises, to draw out the implications of understanding these events as spectacular political experiments, and to think further about the politics of public mediation that emerges from this analysis.

As I have shown in this chapter, each of the three events resourced multiple forms of subjectivity and practice, often at the same time. Viewed at in one way, each was therefore *over-determined*. However, since each exercise was also dependent for its enactment on participation and for its credibility and legitimacy on practices of active participation and public self-organisation each event was set up in a certain way as *underdetermined* or even *blank* (Hetherington and Lee, 2000; Hetherington, 2002) prior to moments of participation.

The process of identifying and reflecting on the differences between how these spectacular political experiments were mediated is a useful one because it affords a better understanding of why the results of the different exercises were so different and helps us better account for the differences between the results that were produced *within* each exercise. These exercises showed evidence of multiple and often competing characteristics as this analysis has attempted to show: they were neither straightforwardly one thing nor another. The character and constitution of these exercises also mutated during these events and tensions between different internal characteristics opened-up ambiguities and generated contradictions. The events, then, had somehow to mediate different and often competing ideas of the public, negotiate different modes of politics and work to reconcile the instabilities and ambiguities that resulted in the participation process itself. While certain forms of conduct and certain ways of reconciling these tensions were privileged over

others in each setting, these exercises nevertheless opened-up possibilities for participants to negotiate and reconcile these ideas and imperatives for action.

Each initiative therefore constituted and performed publicness in diverse ways; articulated different modes of politics with one another; and summoned up political subjects with different and often competing sets of needs, desires and identifications – identifications that cross-cut, interrupt and trouble each other. Each worked to limit participation but each widened possibilities for politics and forms of public action as well. It is useful here to reflect on the three exercises as being *political experiments* because, constructed in these ambiguous ways, each was given not only a technical but also futuristic, ultramodern and rather beguiling allure – with this summoned up by the multiplicity of (often-competing) promises, hopes, fears, aspirations and forms of ‘new’ practice that each event was associated with.

A way to view these events therefore is as *spectacles*, and I suggest that the subject position offered to participants in these settings is that of the *active spectator*. Participants were constituted as subjects with the capacity to imagine, sense, reflect on, translate, ignore, elaborate, negotiate or transform the ideas and objects with which they were presented during these events.

The idea of an ‘active spectator’ may seem peculiar, not least because academic accounts of the ‘spectacle’ are still dominated by the idea that spectatorship connotes an inherently passive form of subjectivity. The works of Adorno and Horkheimer (1979) and Guy Debord (1977) are still crucial starting points for any discussion of the spectacle. For them both spectatorship and the spectacle were synonymous with the world of commodities. In each of their accounts the subject of the spectacle is an isolated, fragmented individual who is seduced, dominated, alienated, manipulated and unable to articulate resistance to the mesmerising and

immersive allure of spectacular commodity culture. In these accounts the subject of the spectacle is a passive subject, a subject who can only ever be external to (if also compelled towards) the objects of consumer society.

Some recent work on the spectacle has, however, contested the idea that spectacles necessarily foreclose critical distance and other more active forms of engagement. In his volume *Capitalisms Eye*, the cultural geographer Kevin Hetherington engages critically with these highly pervasive ideas of consumer subjectivity.

While concurring with Debord that the space of the commodity works to take possession of the subject, Hetherington departs from Debord by asserting that the spectacle can *also* invite subjects to take possession of commodities (2008: 1-49). The commodity relation, for Hetherington, therefore possesses *and* invites subjects to take possession (ibid.). The spaces of these relations are therefore “spaces of *both/and* rather than *either/or* composition; spaces of bewilderment, fantasy, manipulation, fragmented experience, mythical displaced meanings, and social membership” (2008:184, italics in original). On encountering the spectacle, Hetherington therefore suggests that “the subject occupies the *paradoxical* space of possession” (ibid; italics added).

Hetherington’s study is specifically concerned with the space of the commodity relation. However, it is possible to suggest links between Hetherington’s account and my own research since each is concerned with entities that are constituted in ways that make them paradoxical and ambiguous. As has been shown in this and the previous chapter, these exercises were constituted as experiences that would facilitate opportunities for public self-organisation and public leadership *and* as experiences that would facilitate the development of particular pre-existing political

organisations, ongoing public projects and pre-existing ways of belonging; exercises that would facilitate various kinds of change *and* particular forms of continuity.

There are echoes of Hetherington's account of the spectacle here since, in the case of these exercises – as in Hetherington's description of the space of the commodity relation – subjects are invited to take possession of the experiences and of the ideas they were offered in these settings (through forms of public self-organisation); and also invited to be possessed by, or at least not wholly to challenge, the pre-existing status of certain established political organisations, ongoing public projects and bonds of association and belonging. The claim I am making here therefore is that the three exercises should be understood as spectacles for two inter-related reasons: first, because they each brought into being a set of spectacular and often competing claims, promises and aspirations; and, secondly, because they each invited and offered participants opportunities to translate, reflect on and negotiate these claims, promises and aspirations.

In another recent contribution, Jacques Ranciere (2007) also challenges many of the presumptions typically associated with the idea of the spectacle. Like Hetherington, Ranciere deconstructs and reconceptualises the idea that spectatorship necessarily needs to be associated with passivity. Contesting the idea that it might ever be possible to close fully the distance between communicating subjects, in *The Emancipated Spectator* Ranciere argues that forms of mediation are a precondition of, rather than a barrier to, effective communication (2007:275-279). In this way Ranciere troubles the binary between direct and mediated communication that is deployed in those theories of spectatorship generated by Debord and others. Rather than conceptualising spectatorship as a subject position that has to be overcome, and mediating objects as barriers to communication

imposing unnecessary distance between subjects, Ranciere asserts that spectatorship is “our normal situation”:

“[W]e learn, we teach, we act and know as spectators who link what they see with what they have seen and told, done and dreamt. There is no privileged medium as there is no privileged starting point” (2007: 279)

For Ranciere, the goals of communitarian immediacy, direct communication and self-presence are not only unachievable but also undesirable. Rather than attempting to overcome the objects that mediate communication, he calls for greater individual and collective engagement with such objects. Ranciere emphasises the active role of the spectator as an interpreter and translator and in these and other ways works to recognise and celebrate the inventive and transformative potential of forms of *active spectatorship* (ibid. 277-279).

Clear links can be made here between the way that Ranciere renders the act of spectatorship as an active and transformative process and notions of translation that were developed in the final section of the previous chapter (chapter 6, section 6.4). Hetherington and Ranciere each help to elaborate the notion of translation and apply it in settings – such as those on which this research has focused – where sets of particularly paradoxical and spectacular claims are mobilised. The purpose of this chapter has been to not simply explore the discursive qualities of these translation processes, but also to explore how various ideas of participative public politics were inscribed into the assembly designs to make these, rather more concrete forms of mediation, both attractive and manageable.

Unlike Ranciere, Hetherington does not specifically use the concept of translation nevertheless his work, together with Latour (1993, 1996, 2005) and Callon (1986)

and other scholars of translation, is useful for this research. Each of these scholars encourages (in different ways) the exploration of the aesthetic, experiential and material, as well as the more ostensibly discursive and textual, aspects of mediation.

This chapter has highlighted the similarities and underlined the importance of the range of differences between the resources that were utilised by these exercises. It might be important to acknowledge these differences because ideational and technological resources such as these can, according to authors such as John Allen, be understood as “the media of power” (2004: 24). Each initiative puts different resources into play and by so doing supports and works to afford particular (and different) forms of publicness and different modes of participative politics (over others). While it maybe useful to think of this set of events as spectacles, each exercise needs to be viewed as a different kind of spectacle.

In the form of comparative analysis undertaken in this chapter and the last I have attempted to accentuate not only a set of differences between the exercises but also the tensions between three different possible ways of conceptualising and mediating participative politics. These tensions can be understood as political tensions between different ways of practising and mediating participative politics. Before concluding I should briefly like to enumerate some of the dimensions of this politics of public mediation which have emerged as a result of this research process.

First, there is a theoretical dimension to this politics. In this chapter, I have begun the process of conceptualising these exercises as being experimental and highly-mediated spectacles. This challenges at least two of the basic assumptions that currently drive and legitimise these and many other similar forms of experimentation: namely, the assumption that these forms of practice will enable

modes of politics that are more *direct*; and the assumption made that that these forms of practice will enable participants to act in ways that are somehow more *authentic*.

My data has demonstrated that these forms of participative public politics are highly mediated and challenge understandings of participative politics that associate such forms with a more *authentic* and *direct* politics. My findings open up questions about how public participation exercises of this kind might be rendered accountable. On what basis might forms of participative politics that are instead understood as *paradoxical* and *experimental spectacles* gain their political legitimacy? Tensions between these two very different and competing understandings have political consequences, especially for those (like myself) who wish to advocate greater access to and experimentation with forms of participative politics. The democratic basis of such forms of spectacular political experimentation will need to be thought through and expressed far more clearly before any such mode of practice will be seen as being politically credible. The issue of how the position being propounded here might be advocated more widely, in and through practice, will be discussed further in the conclusion to this thesis.

An aspect of the politics of public mediation that emerges here relates to tensions surrounding the relative status that is given to different actors, different ongoing political projects and different ways of designing assembly and mediation practices. Many different organisations beyond those on which this study has focused could potentially also have roles in these kinds of exercises. There is a politics here concerning the status of these different organisations in the processes as well as a politics around the role and status of such organisations. Similarly, there is a politics around the status that should be given to particular ongoing public projects in the setting of participative public practice. Furthermore, there is also a politics around

the status and role that should be given to 'different' modes of public conduct; and around how the spatialities and temporalities of public participation practice need to be understood and designed. Each of the case studies examined here worked to negotiate these tensions differently, with different results.

I have attempted to highlight in this chapter how these initiatives, viewed as spectacular political experiments, may be understood as exercises that are generative of 'new' normative pathways for politics and publicness. I want to claim that these pathways are 'new' because they opened up (albeit temporarily), and worked hard to distance themselves from, ways of enacting publicness and of performing politics that are indeed different from the more established ways of operating. The normative pathways highlighted here might also be understood as 'new' by means of the processes of mediation which they enacted, they opened up and led to possibilities for engaging with the normative categories of publicness and politics in new and *participative* ways.

While the experiments I have looked at privileged certain norms and particular ways of doing things over others they also gave rise to unstable modes of politics and different ways of enacting public participation. The experiments worked to limit how participative politics might be understood and also – viewed in relation one with one another – these initiatives also problematised and unsettled established ways of thinking about and enacting politics. The process of re-making the normative categories of publicness and politics remains unsettled and highly contested. The struggles that are taking place over their status and credibility are all processes that are ongoing. These experiments are proliferating as I write. Moreover, the project of thinking through and experimenting with new ways of imagining, discussing, constructing, experiencing, sensing and performing normative versions of publicness and politics through large-scale collective participation may not actually

have an end-point. These processes would therefore seem to be generative and ongoing.

The emerging politics of public mediation is not concerned with finding or inventing a conclusive and universal, generalised or straightforwardly transferable technical solution. It is concerned instead with struggles over the relative status of different ways of imagining, practising, performing and mediating publicness. Any such politics of public mediation will therefore also be concerned with political experimentation; the generation and expression of new normative concepts of, and pathways for, publicness and politics; with modes of collective reflexivity; and with forms of active spectatorship.

Conclusion

At the start of chapter 6, the first of my two comparative analytical chapters, I suggested that there was a need to account for the co-presence, in each of the case studies of the three different orientations towards public participation that were identified in chapter 1 and 2. Such an account would need to go beyond assumptions that the three orientations – deliberative, pleasure-seeking and transformative – corresponded to separate domains of practice. By comparing and analysing how these initiatives were constructed in this chapter, I have been able to identify a number of characteristics shared by these exercises. I have shown that, viewed together, these characteristics worked to constitute these events as *spectacular political experiments*.

Utilising this concept, I can now account for the co-presence of the three orientations and forms of practice in each of the case study settings. Each exercise summoned up its authority by distancing itself from established forms of politics: claiming that it would overcome various democratic deficits; by claiming that it would enable forms of politics that would be more direct, authentic and engaging; and by claiming that, by enacting a 'new' mode of politics, they would demonstrate and pre-figure forms of *transformation*.

The work of constructing these exercises as being different also involved offering participants opportunities to perform politics in novel ways that would also be more efficient. In the three settings with which I have engaged this meant opening up possibilities for participants to perform less formally by inviting them to enact *pleasure*, excitement or enjoyment oriented forms of conduct. However, another way of offering 'new' forms of public and political conduct entailed opening up possibilities for participants to perform *deliberative* modes of conduct. These forms of conduct were more instrumental and focused on the production and delivery of various kinds of political results.

By conceptualising these initiatives as spectacular political experiments it also begins to be possible to relate these exercises to broader sets of social, political and technological dynamics. Ideas of democratic deficit; the notion that there is a crisis of representation and of 'representative' political institutions; the idea that politics needs to be re-made so that it is somehow more direct, authentic and stimulating; concepts of public leadership and self-governance; and the idea that spatialities and temporalities of politics need to be re-imagined and re-made, these all had currency across the settings analysed in this research. Each worked, in a different way, to deal with the issue of how it might be possible to respond to, and make the most of, these (supposedly more widely felt) concerns.

These spectacular political experiments did not arise simply in response to any one or any particular combination of the ideas of public participation explored in chapter 1 but also arose out of a combination of contextually and historically specific circumstances, discourses and dynamics.

These participative designs drew on different strands of theory and pre-existing public participation practice, and were also concerned with riding the waves of various geographically, historically and culturally-specific social and political changes. These changes – at least potentially – open out possibilities for the formation of new publics and new modes of politics.

The process of conceptualising and examining these exercises as *spectacular political experiments* has been particularly fruitful because it has made it possible for me to explore how the three orientations and forms of practice I identified in chapters 1 and 2 might be combined, in practice, and the effects of these processes. The approach I have taken has been especially rewarding, however, because it has enabled me to begin tracing and exploring complicated relationships between continuity and change; and to document how struggles concerning what might constitute new and *improved* versions of publicness and politics; and what should (and should not) be understood as ‘old’ and *out of date*, were enacted during these three specific events.

By examining the relationships of similarity and difference between these three exercises, it has become possible for me to explore a great many more of the practices taking place across this extended field than it would have been for me to study through the examination of a single case. By bringing the tensions to the fore between different normative ideas of, and pathways for, politics and publicness I

have started to chart the contours and dimensions of an emerging politics of public mediation.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

I began in chapter 1 by reviewing a particular selection of the literature on public participation, using this literature to help me identify different theoretical positions within what is still is an enormous and expanding scholarly field. I have drawn on further literature outside and beyond this selection in analysing my case studies (chapters 3-5) and when engaging with my comparative analysis of the cases (chapters 6-7). This nevertheless continues to be a fast expanding area of scholarly interest, highlighting perhaps the significance and relevance of my chosen topic.

Nancy Fraser (2007), John Dryzek (2006) and many others continue to develop their thinking in this area. There has been a noticeable shift in these and other scholars' attention in recent years towards both global patterns of public participation and to the significance of web-based technologies as a means of opening-up participation to 'new' publics (for further examples see Leadbeater, 2008 and Drache, 2008).

Nevertheless I would like to suggest that my research makes a distinctive contribution to the field by:

- analysing how the normative categories of publicness and politics are constructed, enacted and re-constructed through publicity materials, via public assembly designs and through the enactment of public participation;

- bringing different literatures and different domains into relation with one another in order to offer a multidisciplinary analysis of a specific set of initiatives;
- showing how facilitation practices work to close-down as well as open-up. This has implications for both policy and practice since such initiatives are often characterised by an naïve optimism that fails to take account of how practices designed to be inclusive may also serve to exclude;
- challenging the assumptions that run through public participation policy and practice that initiatives can somehow engage with 'authentic' publics;
- engaging with the paradoxes and tensions between different ideas of publicness and politics circulating in particular settings;
- foregrounding the spectacular and experimental qualities of these initiatives and using this analysis to begin to theorise these events as spectacles and to suggest that the subject position offered to participants in these settings is that of the 'active spectator';
- contributing to an emerging politics of public mediation.

In concluding my thesis I want to reflect briefly on the status of my research findings; consider the implications of these findings for research on 'publics'; and reflect further on the implications of my findings in terms of a politics of public participation. I begin by returning to questions of research design, and specifically to the theme of reflexivity I developed in Chapter 2.

The status of these research findings

Large amounts of time and effort have thankfully already been spent considering the thorny problem of whether or not (or how) qualitative research might be used to make *generalisations* (for different approaches to this topic see for example Gomm, Hammersley and Foster, 2004; Johnson, Chambers, Raghuram and Tincknell, 2004; Seale, 1999). In my study I have attempted to navigate the problem of generalisability by adopting an approach inspired by Bourdeiu's account of what was termed in chapter 2 *public reflexivity*. In short, I have attempted in this thesis to generate the research in a way that brings my *intellectual* (or research) *responsibilities* into a dialectical relationship with my *public responsibilities*. Here, I have taken this to mean that I should endeavour to deliver on my academic obligation to use the time and resources I have been afforded in order to begin to develop new and useful theoretical concepts (or, perhaps 'tools') which are systematically and coherently related to my empirical findings. Also implied is an obligation to perform this research in a way that is comprehensible and relevant to the publics of this research. For this reason I have endeavoured to relate theory to practice by moving back and forth continuously between the two. This has therefore been a reflexive research process and overall, I have tried not to give a privileged standing to either theory or practice (Carens, 2004:122) but rather have sought to critically engage one with the other.

A risk that has increasingly overshadowed this process as the research progressed is that in trying to develop a useful way, or set of ways, of conceptualising and theorising public participation firmly grounded in the data I could simply be swapping one set of inadequate theorisations of public participation with another. This risk became particularly evident when I conducted a comparative analysis of the three cases. My first challenge was to find a way of discussing the cases without either

valorising or collapsing relationships of difference or similarity. My second challenge was to find a way of speaking to, or being relevant to, publics beyond those directly concerned with each of the three initiatives.

The approach that I eventually used focused on bringing to the fore a set of dynamics that appeared to be common across the three cases. Through this approach I was able to highlight some of the ways in which each of these dynamics was expressed in each of the cases. By doing this I showed the contingency of these forms of expression. My aim was to foreground some of the *particular* factors that accounted for these initiatives being performed in the ways that they were, while, at the same time keeping open the idea that these dynamics and practices could – at least potentially – be performed and configured in other ways to produce exercises and forms of public performance beyond those enacted in these specific cases.

Inevitably, this approach had its own set of limitations. Despite generating a large volume of different kinds of data during the empirical phase of this project, the amount of material with which I was able to engage, was more limited than I had initially hoped it would be. The reason for this was partly because I decided to focus closely on three specific features of each case study. This meant that I confined the description and analysis of materials within certain limits. I also needed to be highly selective in the data I decided to analyse and in making this selection I decided to focus on data sources that appeared to me to offer the richest material. This process of selection was iterative, with initial sweeps of the data informing and serving to narrow the focus of subsequent sweeps, and directing the search for new literature that also assisted me with this process of final selection and analysis.

Despite my care with and attention to these practices of data selection and analysis, it is important to underline that this research process has been exploratory in nature. The status of my research findings and the knowledge constructed from them are therefore provisional. If this is a perceived shortcoming, it needs to be balanced against the innovative nature of the project. Of course novelty has no inherent value. However, if the slightly unconventional character of this research can serve in some small way to open up new research agendas and elicit (or even simply contribute to) new conversations, then it will, I feel, have been worthwhile. My desire has been from the outset of this research to facilitate greater reflexivity around the concept and the practice of publicness, not just my own reflexivity of course but that of a wider range of (already existing or emergent) publics. Such a process is unlikely to be smooth or to have a clear end-point. My aspiration, nevertheless, is that this study makes a contribution to this process.

The case studies demonstrate the inadequacy of the boundaries and assumptions that are made by the three literatures and, by extension, the capacity of these literatures to account for the diverse forms of publicness and politics that were brought into relation with one another in each setting. Generating the three case studies also made it possible for me to conduct a comparative analysis which, as a result, has opened-up a space for the development of an original way of accounting for the diversity of practices documented throughout this research. This resulted in the development of the concept of *paradoxical publicness* and the idea of the *spectacular political experiment*. I want to assert here that despite these concepts being developed specifically to help account for the findings of this research these concepts also hold out the possibility of opening-up new academic and practitioner agendas. The results of this research, therefore, I want to claim, potentially have wider relevance and even practical application.

Implications of this project for research on 'publicness'

Three implications arise for contemporary scholarship and research on public participation out of the findings of this research. The first relates to an engagement with normative theories of public participation; the second relates to theorising the subjects of public participation exercises; the third relates to understandings of public participation as a field of research.

As I outlined in the case study chapters, each initiative worked to summon a public who could contribute to the development of new and more democratic processes of public participation in politics. The concepts of publicness and politics generated in these settings were normative but also, as I have highlighted, paradoxical. I have gradually begun recognise that the normative theories of public participation I reviewed in chapter 1 also have paradoxical qualities.

While the core paradox with which I have been concerned – that between publics of change and publics of continuity – is not made explicit in these theories, I should like to claim nevertheless that it is implicitly inscribed into each of these renditions.

A possible implication of this research may therefore be the need to acknowledge that *all* theories of public participation are constructions that are inscribed with and may never be able to rid themselves of this paradox. This paradox may be obscured, elided or denied – but it will not disappear. Of course, this holds only if we concur with the findings of this research, findings that has been supported here by Warner's idea that all publics, to be a public, are inherently unstable. The challenge this raises for normative theorists of public participation is therefore to acknowledge

this paradox more openly, and to construct theories that make political and ethical cases for particular approaches to dealing with this paradox.

The second implication arising out of this study suggests that, for those researching publicness, the publics invited to participate in forms of public participation cannot (or possibly should not) any longer be invited as, or considered to be, authentic publics. While I am not going so far as to suggest that publics can be or should *only* be addressed as *active spectators*, I do want to underline the importance of the various kinds of mediation practice that have been brought to the fore by this research. I even want to go so far as to claim that public participation exercises will *always* be dependent for their construction and performance on forms of mediation. As this research has demonstrated, there is not, at least in any straightforward sense, a *direct* way of participating in politics nor is there is a singular *authentic* public. Instead there are multiple, possibly infinite, modes of politics and forms of publicnesss. While certain ideas of the public are privileged over others, and indeed may hold more status than others in particular settings at particular moments, these ideas, as I have shown, are contested and therefore unstable and only ever 'settled' temporarily.

The third and final implication that I want to register here concerns how the field of public participation research needs to be understood and engaged with. This research has shown that separations and boundaries between different domains and orientations towards public participation are being challenged by contemporary practices. It has also shown how different normative framings, pathways and participatory technologies are being condensed within particular sites. This has not resulted in a field that is in any way flatter or more homogenous; on the contrary, my research indicates that it results in a field that is more, rather than less, complex.

This has repercussions for academic researchers and means researchers who have until now been concerned solely with one or other of these domains or orientations towards practice need to bring their work into closer conversation with one another. It also suggests that separations and boundaries that have been assumed to 'really exist' will increasingly need to be engaged with as boundaries that are porous and constructed and re-constructed are shifted or even temporarily erased via different kinds of practice. None of this will mean that work specialising in researching one or other of these domains or orientations will decline in relevance; on the contrary, it will be crucial to hold onto what is distinctive about these knowledges in order to bring them into the conversation and into a more reflexive relationship with knowledges and practices from other areas.

Towards a politics of public mediation

The *aim* of this thesis is: **to demonstrate how studying the enactment of contemporary public participation can illuminate the normative categories of publicness and the political.**

I had hoped on commencing this project that this study might somehow contribute to the much larger and more long-term project of determining how normative categories of publicness and politics might be generated publicly, through forms of ongoing, large-scale, collective participation. I have already suggested in chapter 7 that immanent to the findings of this research is an emergent *politics of public mediation* and, as I have already indicated, this politics is likely to be multi-

dimensional. To re-iterate and elaborate further the dimensions of this politics that have emerged from this research, relate to:

- (i) the status of different ways of theorising public participation;
- (ii) the status of pre-existing political organisations and institutions;
- (iii) the status of different ongoing public projects;
- (iv) the status of different modes of public conduct and forms of self-organisation;
- (v) the spatialities and temporalities of public participation;
- (vi) the numbers of people involved (and not involved) in participative exercises;
- (vii) the results of public participation that are needed;
- (viii) how the results of public participation should be produced;
- (ix) what should count as public knowledge (and what should count as expertise);
- (x) the resources that should be, or need to be, made available for public participation;

- (xi) how public subjectivity, public capacity and public competence are understood;
- (xii) how the spectacle and spectatorship are understood;
- (xiii) how exercises do or do not intersect with the wider dynamics of continuity and change.

Such points as these listed above might go some towards offering a framework for evaluating public participation policy and practice, but such a project is beyond the scope of this thesis. I should like to suggest here, however, that these thirteen points suggest tensions and fault-lines that only became evident once the three cases were brought into relation one with the other. These dimensions of a politics of public mediation summon up a set of issues and problems that, I should like to claim, need to be dealt with not only by public participation scholars but also through collective public action.

Here, then, we are faced with one final area of political struggle that is immanent to those others listed above – that is, what it means to perform *public representation*.

The forms of politics and the ideas of the public that were at stake in each of the three case studies were different. But each of the exercises enacted in the case studies offered, what were at least cast as, more representative forms of politics: forms of politics that would somehow better represent the particular publics to which these exercises appealed. In each case study these publics were particular kinds of collectives – collectives associated with particular pre-existing characteristics,

commitments, capabilities, geographies, needs and aspirations, or in short, shared norms and ways of life.

Contributing to the way each exercise worked to make itself publicly credible was its method of setting itself up as an exercise that could involve and include large numbers of people. It is critical to acknowledge, however, that these exercises were both self-authorised and did not involve 'whole' publics. Instead, each was set-up by what Urbinati and Warren have called "self-authorised" representatives (2008:405), with each setting out to enrol a representative mix of participants. What this meant was once again different in each case. In order to enact public representation, each exercise, in a different way, also *miniaturised* (cf. Lezuan, 2008:7) its public and in doing this, each depicted public participation events as public experiments that opened-out opportunities to experiment with and pre-figure new forms of public representation.

The final element of a politics of public representation that I should like to highlight here are the struggles that are building up over the role of public participation exercises in relation to more established and conventional forms of politics. No longer is it tenable to assume that public participation exercises, even in their idealised form, might somehow signify a step beyond existing forms of political practice. Instead, as I have already suggested, these initiatives need to be understood as practices existing in relation to more established and ongoing forms of politics. The need for a theory (or theories) of representation that can help better account for and engage with the relations between new and more participatory and less new and rather more conventional forms of politics is increasingly acknowledged by scholars working in the discipline of political science (Urbinati and Warren, 2008: 407). However, any such theory will inevitably be contested. For this

reason I believe such theories will themselves need to be situated and brought into conversation with the kind of emerging politics of public mediation that I have begun to sketch.

The need for such a politics is again illustrated by two further examples I have come across in the last six months. The first is a publication launched earlier this year by the campaigning organisation London Councils as part of its Project 2010 initiative that is aimed at recruiting a more representative mix of the public to stand in the next local elections. The publication is called 'The X Factor: a talent spotter's recruitment manual for the 2010 elections' (available online). Its launch was accompanied by a half page advertisement in the London Evening Standard and a headline that read "Council's seek the X-Factor" with the subheading reading, "the hunt is on for talent, particularly from ethnic minorities, to be councillors in 2010" (Evening Standard, 14 April, 2008:51). Here we are presented with a local government organisation again supporting a form of democratic renewal but this time doing this by adopting the tone of a popular television broadcaster.

The second example is an initiative called Building Democracy that was launched in August 2008 by the UK Government's Ministry of Justice as part of its 2008 Governance of Britain programme. The Building Democracy contest offers "you" (the British public) the chance to come up with concrete ideas to help improve "our democracy" (homepage of buildingdemocracy.co.uk). This scheme offers £150,000 to the ten proposals most likely to "help people address public issues and influence government" (homepage of buildingdemocracy.co.uk). An interactive website has been set up that enables people to post proposals and develop them collaboratively through public participation. Just as the Social Forum process encourages activists to involve themselves in the development of its participative designs, so the UK

government is now actively engaging citizens in the development and enactment of state governance mechanisms and experiences using online participative media.

As such experiments continue to increase in number and ambition my expectation is that the politics of these and other forms of public mediation will become an increasingly urgent, exciting and potentially progressive area of academic concern and public engagement. As I take this project forward and present and discuss this research publicly I look forward to more participation, debate (and contestation!) about the meaning, value and direction of this politics. If this politics catches on in some way and publics really are inherently unstable entities (and engines of social mutation), who knows where this might lead?

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London Councils website:

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Power Inquiry:

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UK Participatory Budgeting Unit:

www.participatorybudgeting.org

World Social Forum Charter of Principles document:

www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=4&cd_language=2

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Television

Vote for Me, broadcast on ITV in the UK January 10-14, 2005.

Appendix 1: Breakdown of data collected, generated, reviewed and analysed during this research

Case 1 – Harrow Open Budget:

Feature being researched	Data collected /generated and reviewed	Data selected for analysis in case study chapter
Publicity	Screen-grabs of the Harrow Open Budget website, three press articles, flier.	Selected elements and pages of Harrow Open Budget website.
Public assembly	Ethnographic notes, photographs taken with digital camera, documents distributed to those participating in the Harrow Open Budget.	Selected observations recorded in ethnographic notes and a selection of the documents distributed to participants.
Participants interactions	Ethnographic notes, transcript generated by organisers documenting comments recorded by table-facilitators during the Harrow Open Budget assembly event.	One section of the transcript of participants' comments.
Context	Interviews with Adam Lent, clerk to the Power Inquiry and Harrow Councillor 23/01/06 and another serving Harrow Councillor who wished to remain anonymous 17/03/06. I attended three meetings subsequent to the main Harrow Open Budget event at which the Harrow Open Budget 'panel' met to follow-up on the results of the main event. I also attended the Council meeting at which the final 2006-7 budget was set, this took place in the Harrow Council chambers on 23/02/06.	Extracts of interview with Adam Lent.

Table 9: Harrow Open Budget – data sources

Case 2 – Vote for Me:

Feature being researched	Data collected/ generated and reviewed	Data selected for analysis in case study chapter
Publicity	3 press releases, 6 press articles.	One of the press releases.
Public assembly	Ethnographic notes generated whilst attending the broadcast of episode two of Vote for Me as a member of the studio audience, a video recording of the five episodes of Vote for Me, a transcript of the five episodes of Vote for Me.	The video recording of the five episodes of Vote for Me, the transcript and notes made from the transcript and repeated viewings of the video. Ethnographic notes made while attending the broadcast of episode 1 as a member of the studio audience.
Participants interactions	Ethnographic notes generated whilst attending the broadcast of episode two of Vote for Me as a member of the studio audience, a video recording of the five episodes of Vote for Me, a transcript of the five episodes of Vote for Me.	The video recording of the five episodes of Vote for Me, the transcript and notes made from the transcript and repeated viewings of the video.
Context	19 press articles.	3 press articles.

Table 10: Vote for Me – data sources

Case 3 – the 4th European Social Forum:

Feature being researched	Data collected/generated and reviewed	Data selected for analysis in case study chapter
Publicity	Screen-grabs of six different Social Forum websites, leaflets, fliers and programmes collected from 9 different Social Forum events, the World Social Forum Charter of Principles document.	The World Social Forum Charter of Principles document, a sample of pages of the 4 th European Social Forum website, a sample of pages of the 4 th European Social Forum programme.
Public assembly	Ethnographic notes taken at 6 different Social Forum events. The programme of the 4 th European Social Forum. Photographs and more extensive ethnographic notes generated at the 4 th European Social Forum in Athens, May 4-7 2006.	4 th European Social Forum programme and ethnographic notes generated during this event.
Participants interactions	Ethnographic notes generated as a result of 7 months involvement (meetings, social interaction) with London Social Forum participants, ethnographic notes generated while attending the 4 th European Social Forum in Athens – this included notes taken while attending formal meetings and notes taken while speaking more informally to a range of participants.	Samples of my ethnographic notes.
Context	Attended 3 rd European Social Forum in London 15-17 October 2004 as participant observer and generated ethnographic notes, reviewed a range of Social Forum websites and bulletin boards.	None.

Table 11: The 4th European Social Forum – data sources